

Benefits (Good Things; Rewards) of Christ's Atoning (Cleansing and Forgiving) Sacrifice¹



SABBATH—DECEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 8:34–39; 1 Corinthians 15:16–18; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 3:21, 22; 1 John 1:9.

MEMORY VERSE: “People now come to God through him [Jesus]. And he is able to save them completely and for all time. Jesus lives forever. He prays for them” (Hebrews 7:25, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To examine the work of Christ as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.² This will show that it is part of His work of salvation³ for our own good.

CHRIST'S IMPORTANT WORK AS HIGH PRIEST for us in the heavenly temple does not undo or change what was done for us at the cross. Without Jesus we would not be able to have the richness of grace⁴ as a gift from God. Believers receive the full blessing of salvation from the Cross through Christ's work as High Priest in heaven. All the benefits (the good things we receive; rewards) of the Cross are ours through faith in His atoning sacrifice.

“ ‘All of you who live anywhere on earth, turn to me and be saved’ ” (Isaiah 45:22, NlrV). That is the message of Christ's death on the cross. Salvation through Christ's sacrifice is available to us through His work as High Priest in heaven. This week we will examine how we profit from Christ's high-priestly ministry (work) in heaven. In that way we better can understand God's saving grace.

1. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as a life, to save or help someone or something.

2. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

3. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

4. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 7**RESURRECTION⁵ AND ASCENSION⁶ (1 Corinthians 15:16–18)**

It is very important that we understand the doctrine (church belief) of Christ's resurrection. This is because without it there is no forgiveness of sin, no salvation, and no hope of eternal (forever) life.

In 1 Corinthians 15:16–18, how closely does Paul connect atonement⁷ with the resurrection of Jesus?



The death of Jesus would have no power to save us from sin if He had not risen from the dead.

The death of Christ would not have had any atoning (cleansing) or forgiving power if the Lord had not risen from the dead. As a result, we should not limit the atoning work of Christ to a single event within God's plan of salvation. The Cross and the resurrection are two parts of one inseparable work of salvation.

After reading 1 Peter 3:21, 22 and Romans 8:34–39 how would you explain the close connection between the resurrection, the ascension, and Christ's work as High Priest in heaven?

Jesus took to heaven our glorified human nature.⁸ So, He opened the doors of heaven to humans (men, women, and children). Christ's resurrection and ascension mean that He finished the work He came to do on earth (John 17:4, 5; John 19:30). Second, through His resurrection and ascension, Christ permanently (always; lasting forever; without change) united (joined together as one) to God the people who will put their faith in His death as our Savior. No power in the universe⁹ could separate them from God. Since Christ removed sin, God's love will flow to His people forever. Third, the ascension of Christ also proves that His victory (win) over evil powers on the cross was final. After

5. resurrection—Jesus' return to life from the dead after dying on the cross.

6. ascension—the return of the risen Christ to heaven.

7. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice (death) on the cross.

8. glorified human nature—new nature after the resurrection (return to life from the dead) that believers receive. It is imperishable (can not be destroyed) and uncorruptible (without sin).

9. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

His ascension, Jesus was made co-ruler with God. He sits at the Father's right hand. "Angels, authorities [evil spirits] and powers are under his control" (1 Peter 3:22, NIV). (Read also Hebrews 10:12, 13.) Christ will remain with the Father until His enemies are under His control. Then He will return to save those who are waiting for Him (Hebrews 9:28). This finally will bring His salvation to a successful end (Philippians 2:10, 11; Revelation 17:14).

What hope does Christ's resurrection from the dead offer you? In what ways does Christ's resurrection guarantee that death does not have to be your final end? If it is, you have only yourself to blame. Why not make the choices now that can save you from the biggest mistake you could ever make?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 8

THE HIGH PRIESTLY WORK OF CHRIST AND ATONEMENT (Hebrews 7:25)

According to Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:1, 2; and 1 John 4:10, what is the relationship between the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross and His priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary?

The death and resurrection of Christ make possible the mediation¹⁰ of Christ before the Father. Christ's mediation means that human¹¹ sin and guilt are not forgotten by the Lord in heaven. It is only through Christ's work for us that His death as our Sacrifice can help us. To God, guilt and sin continue to be part of the human experience. That makes the work of the High Priest before the Father a very important part of the plan of salvation.

In the Bible the mediation of Christ before the Father never is separated from His atoning sacrifice. The sacrifice was offered for the good of humans. But its forgiving power continues to work for those who repent (being sorry for sin and turning away from sinning) and are converted.¹²

Forgiveness is given from God to us through Christ's work (Ephesians 4:32). But it also is through Christ that repentance¹³ reaches the human heart (Acts 5:31). Christ's atoning sacrifice still can be offered for the forgiveness of sins that believers do *after* they are converted. This is because even after conversion, sin still can bother us. In such cases, John says we have an advocate¹⁴ who can represent us before God. Through Him we can be forgiven (1 John 2:1, 2).

10. mediation—the work of Christ as High Priest in heaven between God and His people on earth.

11. human—having to do with men, women, and children.

12. converted—the process of having one's life changed for the better after having accepted Jesus as Savior.

13. repentance—the act of being sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

14. advocate—a person who fights for the rights of people; a lawyer or go-between. In this case, Jesus as High Priest is our advocate in heaven.



Jesus works as our High Priest before the Father.

It is perhaps for that reason that Hebrews 2:17 uses the verb¹⁵ *to make atonement* (NIV) to show that the work of Jesus for us is taking place right now. This suggests Christ is working to restore (bring back) us to God. This means that on the cross Christ got salvation for all. But through His work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, He is putting to use His “good work” on the cross for those who believe in Him. Without the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the atoning (cleansing) power of the Cross would not be available to sinners. Christ’s mediation (work in heaven) is rooted in the Cross. This mediation is not just in addition to Calvary. Instead, it is a very important part of the meaning of God’s forgiving power. It shows the deep and permanent atoning power of His death as our Sacrifice.

15. verb—a word that shows action.

16. Mediator—a lawyer or go-between who helps bring quarreling people together. Jesus is the Mediator between God and us. Jesus helps to bring us back to God. He is our lawyer in the heavenly court. He works to make peace between God and us.

Have you sinned, even after you have accepted Jesus as your Savior? If so, what comfort do you get, knowing that Christ is mediating God’s forgiveness in your behalf in heaven? Why is that knowledge so important for us to have?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 9

MEDIATION (WORK) OF CHRIST IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY (John 16:23, 24)

What do John 16:23, 24; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 13:20, 21 tell us about what Christ is doing for us as our Mediator¹⁶ in heaven?

The death of Christ cannot be separated from His resurrection. In the same way we should not separate His work as King and Mediator after the Resurrection. The real purpose of the Resurrection was to make Christ our High Priest. Jesus finished His work as our Sacrifice on the cross and is now working as King and Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The move from a lowly position to glory shows an additional development of His work as Savior. This does not change the true meaning of His atoning death as our Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:12). But it does show more benefits (the good things we receive; rewards) for us from it.

Christ began His work as Mediator right after He became High Priest. This event had a direct influence¹⁷ on the church. As a result of that work of mediation, "Christ's toiling, struggling ones on earth [His followers] are 'accepted in the Beloved [Jesus]' Ephesians 1:6. Before the heavenly angels and the people of unfallen worlds, they are forgiven and declared righteous [holy]."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 834. When Christ's followers were forgiven and made righteous in heaven, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came upon them. Jesus promised the disciples (followers) that He would ask the Father to send them another Counselor after He went to heaven (John 14:16, 17). At Pentecost¹⁸ Peter said that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit showed Christ had begun His high-priestly work for those who believed in Christ (Acts 2:33).

The good news is that Jesus still is working for His people. Peter said that Christ must remain in heaven "until the time when God makes everything new. He promised this long ago through his holy prophets"¹⁹ (Acts 3:21, NIV). There are prophecies²⁰ that still need to be fulfilled. And then Christ's work before the Father will end. The full restoration (to make new again) is still in the future. And Christ's work as High Priest is leading

toward it. We still are living within salvation history, between Christ's ascension and His second coming. The time between those two events is filled by His work in heaven and the fulfillment of the mission (calling; purpose) of the church.

What is the meaning of the symbol (word-picture) in Revelation 8:2–5? These verses speak of Christ as our heavenly Mediator. What hope do they give you when you sometimes feel that God cannot accept your prayers?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 10

MEDIATION OF CHRIST AND THE KEEPING OF LIFE (John 3:35)

According to John 3:35; Colossians 1:16, 17; and Hebrews 1:3, how does the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary influence the world of nature?

Earth probably would be as barren as Mars if not for the cross of Christ and for Christ's mediation before the Father. Sin harmed the world of nature. The natural world became an example of how destructive and cruel sin really is. But God did not forget the natural world. The writer of a psalm says, "The LORD is good to all; he

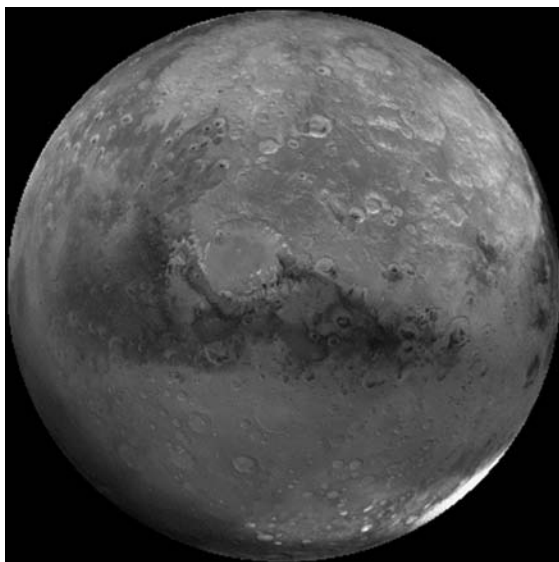
17. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

18. Pentecost—the time when Jesus' followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

19. prophets—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

20. prophecies—messages from God that tell what will happen in the future.

has compassion (mercy) on all he has made" (Psalm 145:9, NIV). The way the Lord cares for the earth is an example of God's love.



Without Jesus' death on the cross, our earth would be as barren as Mars.

Sin threatens life on our planet in a direct way. Out of His love, God decided to save the life He created, even though it was stained with sin. Paul says, " "In him we live and move and exist [live]" ' " (Acts 17:28, NIV). The keeping of our lives is not the result of mechanical laws working independently of God: "The physical structure of man is under the careful watch of God. But it is not like a clock. The clock is set to work and must go of itself. The heart beats. Pulse succeeds pulse. Breath succeeds breath. But the entire life of a person is under the careful watch of God. . . . Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of God who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life. It is

the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM (Creator)." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, page 9. Sinners deserve death. But their natural life is protected through God's grace. It is made possible only through the Cross. Paul and Barnabas said to some pagans,²¹ "He [God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven. He gives you crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food. He fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17, NIV). He "make[s] grass grow for the cattle and plants for people to take care of. That's [That is] how they [the people] get food from the earth" (Psalm 104:14, NIV). All of this totally is undeserved by His people. But it is an example of God's loving grace through Christ (Matthew 5:45; Luke 6:35). God's kindness is not limited to those who serve Him. It spreads out to every person.

Think about today's study: Everyone owes his or her life to Christ's grace. How should this fact influence how you deal with other people? How does this fact help us understand the value of all human life?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 11

**MEDIATION OF CHRIST AND THE
WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
(John 16:8)**

To understand better what grace is,

21. pagans—people who worship idols (false gods) or nature.

Bible thinkers usually talk about *common grace* and *sanctifying grace*. Seventh-day Adventists believe that common grace is the kind that God showed toward sinners by protecting life on the planet. It also is shown in the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart calling us to repentance, confession,²² and conversion.²³ Sanctifying grace or grace that makes us more like Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the person who accepts Christ as Savior.

The death of Christ on the cross set free an atmosphere of grace that is around the planet: "In the limitless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace. It is as real as the air flowing around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the full measure of men and women in Christ Jesus."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 68. This is common grace, available to all who choose to accept it for themselves.

What did Christ promise the disciples in John 14:16? And what was the work that this gift would do, according to John 16:8–11 and Romans 8:9–14?

Jesus said to the disciples that after His return to heaven He was going to send them the Holy Spirit. He also said that the Holy Spirit would "prove that the world's people are guilty. He will prove their guilt concerning sin

and godliness and judgment" (John 16:8, NIV). This is common grace. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make sinful human beings (people) understand their sin, guilt, and separation from God. At the same time, the Holy Spirit points them to the Cross of Christ as the only way out of their hopeless way of life. Without this work of the Holy Spirit, the Cross would not work in itself. But because of the Cross the Holy Spirit is active in the world. His job is to always point sinners to Jesus for their salvation.



Jesus promised His followers that after He returned to heaven He would send them the Holy Spirit.

Grace is not something that humans must accept. Many do refuse to accept it. Grace would not be grace if it were forced upon people. The Lord respects the freedom of the people He created. And nothing equals the Cross in proving that!

22. confession—admitting you have sinned, or saying you believe in Jesus.

23. conversion—the time when a person fully accepts Jesus as his or her Savior and turns away from sin.

In what ways do you find yourself refusing to accept the leading of the Holy Spirit? Why do we do that? Why is this refusal so dangerous? Most important, how can we learn day by day to surrender²⁴ ourselves to God's leading?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 12

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The Savior [Jesus] presents Himself before the Father as our High Priest. He promises to do His work as our Representative.²⁵ As our High Priest, Jesus wants us to know that He puts His sacrifice to work in the golden censer.²⁶ In this way He may combine (join) it with the sincere prayers of His people. It is very important that we pray much because our prayers go to the throne of God. There our prayers are combined with the sweet smell of Christ's righteousness [holy life]. Our voice is not the only voice that God hears. Before the voice reaches the ear of God, it joins with the voice of Christ. And the Father always hears Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 7, page 166.

“But so long as Jesus remains our High Priest in the sanctuary above, the influence of the Holy Spirit is felt by rulers and people. It still controls

the laws of the land in some way. If it were not for these laws, the condition²⁷ of the world would be much worse than it now is. Many of our rulers are active workers for Satan. But God also has His workers among the leading men of the nation. Satan moves upon his servants to pass laws that would greatly slow down the work of God. But leaders who honor the Lord are influenced by²⁸ holy angels to oppose [go against] such laws with arguments that cannot be answered.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, page 610.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ If God loves us and sent His Son to die for us, why is it necessary for Jesus to continue working as a Mediator before the Father?
- ❷ What does the book of Hebrews tell us about how important and real Christ's work is as High Priest for us in heaven?
- ❸ How does the real work of Christ as High Priest in heaven answer this question: What has Jesus been doing all these years since His resurrection?

24. surrender—to give one's whole life to Jesus.

25. Representative—someone who acts for another.

26. censer—container for burning incense (spices or woods that give off a pleasant smell or perfume when burned).

27. condition—the way a person or a thing is or becomes; a state of being.

28. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.