



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 16, 2017

Discussion Guide

A COMMUNITY CALLED ATONEMENT

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- WHEN YOU CELEBRATE EASTER, WHAT ARE YOU CELEBRATING? DO YOU FIND THAT IT IS EASY OR DIFFICULT TO CELEBRATE THIS ON A REGULAR BASIS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE CONCEPT OF ATONEMENT AND ITS USE IN SCRIPTURE.

- READ EPHESIANS 2.11-22 ALOUD, SLOWLY. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE LISTENING FOR WORDS AND PHRASES WHICH MIGHT STAND OUT TO YOU. PAUSE AND PONDER THESE FOR A MOMENT, INDIVIDUALLY, GIVING SPACE TO ENGAGE WITH GOD FOR THE MEMBERS OF YOUR GROUP.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, WHILE THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS HAS COSMIC REALITIES (EPHESIANS 2.1-10), IT ALSO HAS EVERYDAY REALITIES (EPHESIANS 2.11-22). WHAT ARE THE EVERYDAY REALITIES MADE POSSIBLE BY THE CROSS? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY AS POSSIBLE IN THE TEXT.
- IT WAS SAID THAT THE EVERYDAY REALITIES MADE POSSIBLE BY THE CROSS ARE THE ABILITY TO BELONG TO A PEOPLE WHO HAVE A PURPOSE LARGER THAN THEMSELVES. WHAT ABOUT THIS, IF ANYTHING, MIGHT RESONATE WITH THE DEEP DESIRES OF PEOPLE? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO YOU SEE PEOPLE TRYING TO BELONG AND TO DISCOVER PURPOSE? WOULD YOU CONSIDER THEIR EFFORTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, HAVE YOU BEEN SEEKING TO BELONG AND DISCOVER PURPOSE? WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR EFFORTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL? WOULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO RESPOND TO THE TRUTHS PROCLAIMED IN THIS TEXT ABOUT BELONGING AND PURPOSE? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS YOU FROM RESPONDING IN THESE WAYS?

- CONSIDER CLOSING WITH A TIME OF PRAISE, THANKSGIVING, AND CELEBRATION FOR THE EVERYDAY LIFE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH CHRIST'S ATONING WORK ON THE CROSS. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER SINGING, PRAYING, OR EVEN SIMPLY STATING YOUR GRATITUDE.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

ATONEMENT

ATONEMENT INVOLVES THE PROCESS OF RECONCILING TWO PARTIES BY MAKING THINGS RIGHT BETWEEN THEM. THIS DEFINITION IMPLIES THAT ONE OR BOTH PARTIES HAS DONE SOMETHING TO HARM THE RELATIONSHIP. THUS, ATONEMENT INVOLVES THE RIGHTING OF WHAT HAS GONE WRONG. WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE, THE TWO PARTIES WHICH NEED RECONCILIATION ARE GOD AND PEOPLE. WHAT STANDS BETWEEN THEM IS THE SINFUL ACTIONS OF PEOPLE, A REJECTION OF GOD'S COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM. THEREFORE, ATONEMENT INVOLVES THE RIGHTING OF SIN SO THAT GOD AND PEOPLE MIGHT ONCE AGAIN BE IN COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THE EXPRESSION "TO MAKE ATONEMENT" AND OTHER VARIATIONS OF THE EXPRESSION IS FOUND THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE WITH NO SINGLE WORD BEING USED TO DESCRIBE THE PROCESS. RATHER, A RANGE OF SIMILAR WORDS ARE USED, OFTEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LONGER PHRASES, TO DESCRIBE THE PROCESS OF ATONEMENT. IN EVERY CASE, ATONEMENT RESTS UPON THE MEANS PROVIDED BY GOD, THOUGH PEOPLE MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS, PARTICULARLY IN THEIR OFFERING OF REPENTANCE AND SACRIFICE. WHILE PEOPLE ARE THE PRIMARY OBJECT OF GOD'S PROVISION FOR ATONEMENT, THE REST OF CREATION IS ALSO INCLUDED IN GOD'S DESIRE TO ATONE, AS CAN BE SEEN IN THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN EVEN FOR REDEEMING (ATONING FOR) HOUSES, MOLDS, AND SKIN DISEASES (LEVITICUS 13-15). SOMEHOW, IN GOD'S MIND, TO BE RECONCILED WITH PEOPLE INVOLVES THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL OF CREATION (COLOSSIANS 1.19-20).

WHEN SCRIPTURE REFERS TO ATONEMENT, NO ONE THEORY OR MECHANISM IS EVER PRESENTED; THAT IS, SCRIPTURE NEVER DESCRIBES EXACTLY HOW ATONEMENT MAKES THINGS RIGHT BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE. SCRIPTURE USES MANY METAPHORS TO DESCRIBE ATONEMENT: REDEMPTION (EPHESIANS 1.7); PROPITIATION (ROMANS 3.25); RECONCILIATION (EPHESIANS 2.16); VICTORY (1 CORINTHIANS 15.5-57); RANSOM (MARK 10.45); AND AN EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING (1 PETER 2.21). EACH OF THESE METAPHORS APPROACHES ATONEMENT FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE AND IF THEIR LOGIC IS TRACED OUT,

LEAD TO VERY DIFFERENT MECHANISMS BY WHICH ATONEMENT WORKS, SOME LEADING TO WILD THEORIES OF SPECULATION. ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH IS THE EXAMPLE OF RANSOM (MARK 10.45). THIS METAPHOR ONCE GAVE RISE TO AN INTENSE DEBATE AS TO WHOM THE RANSOM WAS PAID WITH ONE ANSWER BEING GIVEN AS SATAN, WHICH, IN THEORY GAVE SATAN, POWER AND ADVANTAGE OVER GOD! THE ARGUMENT WENT FURTHER THAT, WITH THE RESURRECTION, GOD WAS DUPLICITOUS AND "TRICKED" SATAN BY PAYING THE RANSOM AND THEN TAKING BACK HIS PAYMENT. AS CAN BE SEEN, BY TRACING OUT THE LOGIC OF THIS METAPHOR, THEOLOGIANS WERE LED TO FORMS OF SPECULATION WHICH CONTRADICTED THE VERY NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD, SUCH AS GOD BEING DUPLICITOUS. THE SAME MIGHT BE SAID FOR EVERY ATTEMPT TO DISCERN THE MECHANISM OF ATONEMENT BEHIND THE METAPHORS FOR ATONEMENT FOUND IN SCRIPTURE. PERHAPS THE MOST PREVALENT MODERN EXAMPLE IS THAT OF THE PENAL-SUBSTITUTIONARY THEORY OF ATONEMENT, WHICH IF TRACED OUT VERY FAR LEADS ONE INTO THE TERRITORY OF PAGAN THEOLOGY CONCERNING WRATH AND VINDICATION BY ANGRY GODS.

IT IS PERHAPS BEST TO ADMIT THAT SCRIPTURE SEEKS TO IDENTIFY ATONEMENT AND ITS OUTCOME BUT NEVER ITS MECHANISM. HOWEVER, THERE ARE TWO CONSISTENT ELEMENTS WHICH ARE ALWAYS PART OF THE PROCESS OF ATONEMENT: SACRIFICE AND COVENANT. ATONEMENT IS ONLY NECESSARY IF THERE IS A PRE-EXISTING BOND BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE, A BOND WHICH ATONEMENT RESTORES. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE SACRIFICE WAS PRIMARILY THAT OF ANIMALS, ALTHOUGH, MONEY OR THE OFFERING OF ONE'S LIFE COULD BE A SUFFICIENT SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE (LEVITICUS 16; EXODUS 30.12-16; 2 SAMUEL 21.3-6). EACH OF THESE SACRIFICES WERE OFFERED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT, INTENDED TO RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL, A DEALING WITH THEIR SIN SO THEY MIGHT REMAIN IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND THUS REMAIN IN THE LAND OF PROMISE (LEVITICUS 16; DEUTERONOMY 28). HOWEVER, THESE SACRIFICES WERE NEVER MEANT TO EFFECT TRUE ATONEMENT BUT SIMPLY POINTED TO THE NEED FOR A SACRIFICE IN THE PROCESS OF ATONEMENT. THE ONLY SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE IS THAT OF CHRIST HIMSELF (HEBREWS 9.26; 10.4-10). IT IS HIS SACRIFICIAL DEATH WHICH RECONCILES PEOPLE TO GOD BY DEALING WITH THEIR SIN (MARK 10.45; 2 CORINTHIANS 5.21) AND RESTORES PEOPLE TO THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP GOD INTENDED FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME WITH PEOPLE, A RENEWED OR NEW COVENANT MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE DEATH OF CHRIST (LUKE 22.20).

THE TEXT

EPHESIANS 2.11-22:

ATONEMENT, A PEOPLE, AND A PURPOSE

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS IS HIS MOST GENERAL LETTER, ONE WHICH OUTLINES THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD IN AND THROUGH CHRIST. IT IS THEREFORE A WONDERFUL TEXT FROM WHICH TO SEEK A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF ATONEMENT AS THE PROCESS OF ATONEMENT IS AT THE HEART OF GOD'S REDEEMING WORK. PAUL BEGINS THIS LETTER BY NOTING THAT REDEMPTION (RESTORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE—ATONEMENT) HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOD'S PLAN, AND THAT THIS PLAN HAS BEEN EFFECTED THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS. IT IS THIS PLAN, WHEN FULLY ACCOMPLISHED THAT BRINGS ALL OF CREATION BACK INTO ITS PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST (EPHESIANS 1).

WITH RESPECT TO PEOPLE, GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK IN CHRIST INVOLVES A RESCUING OF PEOPLE FROM A LIVING "DEATH" WHICH INVOLVES SEPARATION FROM GOD TO A LIFE OF CONNECTED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (EPHESIANS 2.1-6). THIS RESTORATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE IS THE WORK OF GOD ALONE, AN EXPRESSION OF HIS GRACE AND KINDNESS, A GIFT WHICH RESTORES PEOPLE TO THE LIFE GOD PLANS FOR THEM (EPHESIANS 2.7-10). WHILE PAUL'S WORDS DESCRIBE REDEMPTION (ATONEMENT) AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, HE DOES NOT FULLY DESCRIBE WHAT THIS LIFE ENTAILS. WHAT DOES ATONEMENT LOOK LIKE IN THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE? WHAT IMPACT DOES BEING IN A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS BRING?

IN THE FOLLOWING VERSES, PAUL BEGINS TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION FOR HIS AUDIENCE, AN AUDIENCE WHICH CONSISTS MOSTLY OF GENTILE BELIEVERS. PAUL BEGINS BY OUTLINING THE FORMER LIFE EXPERIENCE AND SITUATION OF THESE GENTILE BELIEVERS BEFORE THEY BEGAN TO FOLLOW JESUS IN FAITH. ONE MIGHT SIMPLIFY PAUL'S DESCRIPTION TO THE FOLLOWING PHRASE: WITHOUT CHRIST, THESE GENTILES WERE WITHOUT A PEOPLE OR A PURPOSE.

IN THEIR FORMER STATE, THE GENTILES WERE PEOPLE WHO WERE CALLED "UNCIRCUMCISION;" THAT IS, THEY DID NOT BEAR THE SURGICAL MARK WHICH DISTINGUISHED THEM AS BELONGING TO GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE. THOSE WHO DID BEAR THIS MARK (JEWS) WERE PRONE TO POINT THIS OUT. SIMPLY PUT, THE GENTILES DID NOT BELONG TO A SPECIAL PEOPLE. HOWEVER, PAUL IS QUICK TO NOTE THAT "BELONGING" INVOLVED MORE THAN A SIMPLE SURGERY. THEREFORE, THOSE WHO WERE POINTING OUT THAT THE GENTILES DID NOT

"BELONG" THEMSELVES DID NOT REALLY BELONG. BY NOT BEING PART OF GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE, THESE GENTILES WERE NOT JUST SEPARATE FROM CHRIST; THAT IS, THEY DIDN'T KNOW THE HOPE OF THE MESSIAH. AS PEOPLE WHO DID NOT BELONG TO GOD'S PEOPLE, THEY WERE WITHOUT PURPOSE, SEPARATE FROM WHAT GOD WAS DOING IN THE WORLD THROUGH HIS PEOPLE AS IDENTIFIED IN THE COVENANTS. AS PEOPLE WITHOUT PURPOSE, THEY HAD NO HOPE AND THIS WAS ALL ROOTED IN THEIR SEPARATION FROM GOD. HOWEVER, THIS ALL CHANGED THROUGH THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS. THROUGH THIS WORK, THE GENTILES WERE BROUGHT NEAR (RECONCILED/ATONED) TO GOD AND THUS THE STATE OF NOT HAVING A PEOPLE OR A PURPOSE WAS REVERSED.

PAUL DESCRIBES THE NATURE OF THE PEOPLE TO WHICH THE GENTILES NOW BELONG AND THE PURPOSE WHICH THIS BRINGS TO THEIR EVERYDAY. HE BEGINS BY NOTING THAT JESUS IS HIMSELF PEACE FOR PEOPLE. PEACE IS THE PRESENCE OF WHOLENESS AND PAUL DESCRIBES THIS WHOLENESS AS EXISTING BETWEEN TWO PARTIES OF PEOPLE. IN THE CONTEXT, THE PARTIES ARE THE GENTILES (THE NOT-BELONGING PEOPLE) AND THE JEWS (THE PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY BELONG). IN THE WORK OF JESUS, THESE TWO PEOPLE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TOGETHER INTO A SINGLE PEOPLE, THE HOSTILITY BETWEEN THEM BEING DESTROYED. THIS IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE ONE THING WHICH THE JEWS USED TO CLAIM THEY WERE GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE, THEIR OBEDIENCE TO THE MOSAIC LAW, WAS DONE AWAY WITH. THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS, BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND THE LIFE TO WHICH IT LED NO LONGER REQUIRED PERFECT OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW AS DESCRIBED IN DEUTERONOMY 28. GOD DID THIS SO THAT A SINGLE SPECIAL PEOPLE COULD BE FORMED BY WHAT WAS DONE ON THE CROSS, THROUGH WHICH EVERYONE'S HOSTILITY TOWARD GOD WAS DONE AWAY WITH. PAUL'S LOGIC AT THIS POINT IS COMPLEX BUT HIS POINT IS SIMPLE. WHILE THE GENTILES WERE FORMERLY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD NO PEOPLE, NO ONE WITH WHOM TO BELONG, JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS CREATED A SINGLE NEW COMMUNITY TO WHICH BOTH JEW AND GENTILE MIGHT BELONG. THIS IS THE PEACE (WHOLENESS) WHICH WAS PREACHED TO PEOPLE BOTH FAR AND NEAR, THAT ALL PEOPLE HAVE BUT ONE WAY TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER, AND THUS IMPLIED, THEY FORM A SINGLE NEW COMMUNITY.

AS PEOPLE JOIN THIS NEW COMMUNITY, A COMMUNITY MADE POSSIBLE BY ATONEMENT, THEY FIND A NEW PURPOSE IN LIFE. THEY ARE NOT OUTSIDERS, BUT INSIDERS WHO ARE PART OF SOMETHING WHICH BEGAN BEFORE THEM, SOMETHING WHICH CAN BE TRACED BACK THROUGH THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS BUT ULTIMATELY RESTS ON THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS HIMSELF. THIS PURPOSE IS ROOTED IN THE IDEA THAT THIS NEW

COMMUNITY IS BEING SHAPED INTO AN EVER-GROWING TEMPLE ON EARTH IN WHICH GOD HIMSELF DWELLS. THE MENTION OF TEMPLE WAS SIGNIFICANT IN THE FIRST-CENTURY BECAUSE A TEMPLE HAD BUT ONE PURPOSE. A TEMPLE EXISTED TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH. A TEMPLE EXISTED TO BRING GOD AND PEOPLE TOGETHER. THEREFORE, THIS NEW PEOPLE CREATED BY JESUS' ATONING WORK HAVE A PURPOSE OF BRINGING GOD AND EARTH TOGETHER. SIMPLY PUT, THEY BECOME PART OF GOD'S WORK OF ATONEMENT IN CHRIST.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

ATONEMENT. IT IS A BIG WORD, ONE I HEARD OVER AND OVER AGAIN AS I GREW UP IN THE CHURCH. AS I LISTENED, I CAUGHT THAT ATONEMENT INVOLVED MAKING THINGS RIGHT BETWEEN ME AND GOD. I GRASPED THAT THE MEANS OF ATONEMENT WAS THE WORK OF CHRIST UPON THE CROSS, BUT WHAT I NEVER REALLY COULD UNDERSTAND WAS WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. SO, GOD AND I WERE BROUGHT INTO RELATIONSHIP THROUGH WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS. WHAT NOW? AT BEST, THE ANSWER I WAS GIVEN WAS THAT I COULD NOW GO TO HEAVEN WHEN I DIED. WHILE I WAS, AND STILL AM, GRATEFUL FOR THIS TRUTH, IT LEFT ME, THEN AND NOW, SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED. YOU MEAN I HAVE TO WAIT AROUND TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER AND OUTWORKING OF ATONEMENT? THIS WAS PARTICULARLY POIGNANT TO ME EVERY EASTER. AT EASTER, WE CELEBRATE ONE THING: ATONEMENT. WE DRESS UP. WE PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS. WE ARE SUPPOSED TO RESPOND WITH INCREDIBLE JOY. . . BECAUSE WE CAN GO TO HEAVEN WHEN WE DIE. DON'T GET ME WRONG. THIS IS REALLY GREAT, BUT IT GETS HARD TO HAVE THE SAME LEVEL OF ENTHUSIASM EVERY SINGLE YEAR FOR ME WHEN I AM CELEBRATING SOMETHING FOR WHICH IT FEELS LIKE THE PAUSE BUTTON HAS BEEN HIT. IF ATONEMENT HAD SOME VALUE, SOME EVERYDAY VALUE, SOMETHING THAT IMPACTED LIFE NOW, THAT WOULD BE SOMETHING WORTH CELEBRATING.

AS I HAVE CONTINUED TO JOURNEY WITH JESUS, I AM REALIZING MORE AND MORE THAT HIS ATONING WORK, WHILE INVOLVING MY FUTURE, DID NOT FOCUS SOLELY UPON MY FUTURE. ATONEMENT REALLY DOES HAVE PRESENT DAY VALUE. WHAT VALUE YOU MIGHT ASK? ATONEMENT WORKS ITS WAY OUT IN MANY WAYS BUT THE ONES WHICH IMPACT ME THE MOST ARE THE RECEIVING OF A PEOPLE AND A PURPOSE. WITH CHRIST'S ATONING WORK ON THE CROSS, GOD FORMED A NEW COMMUNITY, A COMMUNITY OF ATONEMENT TO WHICH ALL ARE INVITED TO BELONG, AND THIS NEW COMMUNITY HAS AN INCREDIBLE PURPOSE. THIS COMMUNITY EXISTS TO BRING ATONEMENT TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. HIGH MINDED? SURE. BIG DREAMS? ABSOLUTELY. REAL? YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT.

I HAVE SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE WANTING TO BELONG, WANTING A PEOPLE TO CALL MY OWN, A PEOPLE TO CALL ME THEIR OWN. JESUS MADE THAT POSSIBLE. NOT ONLY HAVE I WANTED TO HAVE A PEOPLE

BUT I HAVE LONGED FOR PURPOSE. I WANT TO KNOW MORE THAN WHAT I AM GOING TO DO WHEN I GROW UP. I WANT TO BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF, SOMETHING WHICH CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. JESUS MADE THAT POSSIBLE, WHEN ON THE CROSS HE CREATED A COMMUNITY CALLED ATONEMENT, AND INVITED ME TO BE A PART.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHAT IS THE POINT OF ATONEMENT? THAT IT IS IMPORTANT IS HARD TO MISS. IT IS AT THE HEART OF GOD'S REDEEMING WORK, THE VERY THING WHICH HAPPENS ON THE CROSS. IN ATONEMENT, GOD AND PEOPLE ARE RECONCILED. WONDERFUL AND FANTASTIC, BUT WHAT IS THE POINT? MOST OF THE TIME WE SAY SOMETHING LIKE GOD AND PEOPLE ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER SO PEOPLE CAN LIVE WITH GOD IN HEAVEN. CERTAINLY, THIS IS TRUE. HOWEVER, THIS MAKES ATONEMENT A PRESENT REALITY ABOUT A FUTURE EXPERIENCE. IT IS HARD TO GET EXCITED ABOUT THAT, UNLESS THAT IS, YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAD OFF INTO HEAVEN! FOR MOST OF US TO GET REALLY EXCITED ABOUT ATONEMENT, IT HAS TO HAVE SOME IMPACT ON OUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE, AND IT DOES. ATONEMENT MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO HAVE A PEOPLE AND A PURPOSE, THE VERY THINGS WE DESIRE THE MOST. WE EACH LONG TO BELONG AND EVERY ONE OF US WANTS TO BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES, SOMETHING WHICH WILL CHANGE THE WORLD. ATONEMENT NOT ONLY MAKES THESE POSSIBLE. THESE THINGS ARE THE VERY POINT OF THE EVERYDAY IMPACT OF ATONEMENT. WITH WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS, A NEW COMMUNITY WAS FORMED, A COMMUNITY OF ATONEMENT, AND THIS NEW COMMUNITY HAS AN AMAZING PURPOSE TO JOIN GOD IN CHANGING THE WORLD. THAT IS SOMETHING WORTH CELEBRATING!

THIS WEEK, PONDER FOR A MOMENT THE DEEP DESIRES YOU MIGHT HAVE TO BELONG AND TO BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF. THINK ABOUT THE DIFFERENT WAYS YOU HAVE SOUGHT FOR THESE THINGS AND HOW SATISFYING, IF AT ALL, YOUR SEARCH HAS BEEN. WITH THESE THINGS IN MIND, READ EPHESIANS 2.11-22, A TEXT WHICH OUTLINES HOW ATONEMENT HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO BELONG AND BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF, SOMETHING WHICH CHANGES THE WORLD. CONSIDER HOW GOD MIGHT BE INVITING YOU TO BECOME PART OF THIS NEW COMMUNITY AND TO JOIN HIM IN A PURPOSE LARGER THAN YOURSELF AND CONSIDER HOW YOU MIGHT OR HAVE RESPONDED TO HIS INVITATION. CONSIDER ALSO HOW SAYING "YES" TO HIS INVITATION MIGHT BE CAUSE TO CELEBRATE, NOT JUST AT EASTER, BUT EVERY DAY. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING YOUR PRAYERS AND THOUGHTS.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP