

Welcome back. Hey, this is Mary Ethel Eckard with Drawing Near. You know, I recently wrote a book, it's called *The Making of a Dragonfly, Following Christ Through the Winds of Change*. It was nominated for the prestigious Christian Literary Award. We had the awards banquet this past weekend and though my book did not win, it was a great event and a great opportunity to be with other authors of not only first books but several books, and to be in the company of those who write Christian literature to spread the gospel of Christ and to talk about walking in God's ways. If you haven't purchased my book and are looking for some help in understanding God's ways and how to walk through some really hard days, I've been told it's a really good read, and so I recommend it to you.

Thank you for inviting me into your world. I want to share with you what's on my heart today. So, I have been reading scripture pretty much since I was 8 or 9 years old. A lot of times it's been in the Psalms because those are short and easier to understand. When you get into the books of the Bible like Leviticus or Romans, it's just kind of confusing and there are a lot of things talked about that are hard to understand. A lot of times what we do in those situations is skip over them.

So, raise your hand if you've done this – My hand is raised. I have done this all my life – and even now, after a few years of reading and studying the Bible, I still come to those places where I lack understanding. What I've learned is many times, it is helpful to go back to the history found in the beginning of the Old Testament to understand what the New Testament is talking about.

I've said it quite a few times – the Bible is ONE story about ONE people and ONE God and points us to our ONE Savior, Jesus Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, we see Jesus on every page – we see how God used all the stories in those books to bring us to Jesus and to prepare our hearts for Jesus. The entire Old Testament is preparing the people for the coming Messiah. Yeah, the Old Testament. But until we've read the Bible through at least once, it will be hard to see Jesus in Genesis. It's hard to see Him in Ezra. But once we've read through the Bible, it's easier to pick out what it's speaking of and how Jesus is seen in these sometimes-hard stories.

Because of that, in 2019, we will begin a journey through the Bible – starting in Genesis and will slowly take our time through scripture so we can see Jesus in every page. We will be back and forth between the Old Testament. It's not going to be cumbersome or a dig deep into scripture, but we will look at it on a level deeper than surface, but we will not be in seminary. I will give you an example of what I'm talking about today.

In 2019, I will challenge you to read scripture a week ahead of time, and we will have a time together where we both learn about scripture and how it points to Jesus, to God's love, and to a greater understanding of this world God created for us to live in!

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This week I want to continue with what I've been doing for the past few weeks and go back to I John 2:1-2. As I read verse 2, I was stumped in how to explain the atoning sacrifice of Jesus without going back to the beginning of the Bible – so we are going to jump in, and I will give you a preview of what our 2019 study will look like.

*I John 2:1-2, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**"*

There are two things in these two verses that try to stump me, but I'm going to focus on just one for this podcast. We are going to look at "the atoning sacrifice." To do that, we must go back to the beginning of time to pull this understanding forward. Stay with me.

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In Genesis we see that God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and put them in the Garden of Eden, which He also created. God gave Adam and Eve permission to eat from any tree in the garden of Eden, save one. He instructed them, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Eventually, Satan tempted them by questioning God's words and planting doubt in their mind as to whether they would "surely die" when they ate from the tree.

We read where they fell into temptation and ate from the forbidden tree. And we see that death came immediately upon their disobedience to God. This was not a physical death, but a spiritual death. They were immediately separated from God and tried to cover their sin in two ways. One was to sew fig leaves together to cover their outer body. Then they tried to use excuses, blame, projection and justification to cover their inner guilt. Scripture tells us that God sees the heart and knows our thoughts. He was not fooled by their attempt to cover their sin – God knew immediately when man sinned because a barrier went up between He and His creation. You may ask, what barrier?

Scripture says that sin separates us from having an intimate relationship with God (Isaiah 59). That's easy to explain – when you do something wrong against someone, and you feel guilty and ashamed, you stay away from them because it's hard to face them. We block our relationship with them. It's easier to keep them out of sight and at arm's reach than to humble ourselves and seek their forgiveness.

We do the same when we have sin in our life - we stay away from God because we feel guilty and convicted that we did wrong. Well, just as we go to the person we sinned against or hurt to seek forgiveness and reconciliation, so we go to God for the same thing. I want to tell you, though sin separates us from God, He is always available, always waiting to be invited into relationship with His creation.

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Back to Adam and Eve:

God, in His great mercy, covered their sin and demonstrated His provision and forgiveness. He made garments of skin for Adam and Eve and clothed them. These garments were made from animal skin. This was the first blood sacrifice made for the covering of sin since the creation of the world.

Why did God use an animal sacrifice to cover their sin? God was setting up a system for the people that would later be understood when Jesus was sacrificed to cover the sins of the people. In Leviticus we read that the life of a creature is in the blood. (Leviticus 17:11). "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

The word "atone" in the Hebrew language means to cover. The animal sacrifice in Genesis covered the sins of Adam and Eve inwardly, and the skin from the animal was used to clothe Adam and Eve outwardly. God provided for their spiritual and physical needs.

In the New Testament, Hebrews 9:22, we understand, “The Law requires nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.”

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In Exodus, God set up a system for the Israelites for the forgiveness of sin. Again, He was teaching them in preparation for Jesus. As the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God gave laws to teach them how to live differently than the nations around them. His laws were for their safety and character building – and were to point them to Jesus. Like most of us, they didn’t want to be told what to do or how to do it, but God’s spokesman, Moses, obediently set about to minister to the people in God’s ways and with the laws God set in place for them to follow. God also instructed Moses to build a tabernacle for Him, so He would come and dwell among the people. Again, all these things point to Jesus – but that’s for another time.

In the book of Exodus, the Lord set aside a certain day for the Israelites to deal with their sin. It was called the Day of Atonement. For a full review of this day, read Leviticus 16. Here I will cover the atonement.

Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the High Priest of the Israelites – he was appointed by God to serve in this role. On the day of Atonement, Aaron was to bring two goats and present them before the Lord. Then Aaron would cast lots to determine which goat was to be sacrificed and which was to be kept alive. One goat would be used as a sacrifice for a sin offering. The other was the scapegoat used to make atonement by sending it into the desert.

The goat sacrificed for the sin offering was slaughtered and the blood was sprinkled on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, to make atonement for the sins of the people because of their uncleanness and rebellion, for whatever their sins had been. Then the live goat was brought to Aaron. Aaron would lay both hands on the head of the goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sin – and put them on the goat’s head. Then he would send the goat away into the desert; the goat would carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place.

This was done once each year to atone for the sins of the Israelites. This is a simplistic explanation – but is enough to explain atonement. The blood from the slaughtered goat was used to cover the sins of the people; the sins placed on the head of the second goat were carried away from the people, and their sins were removed from them.

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Now, let’s return to the New Testament.

I John 2:1-2, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**”

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From the time of Genesis, God promised to send a deliverer to take away the sins of the world, one time rather than annually.

Throughout the Old Testament, everything God did was to point people to Jesus. In the New Testament, the promised Messiah came. His name – Jesus. His sole purpose? To be our atonement and scapegoat,

by sacrificing His blood one time, rather than annually, to cover the sins of the world and to carry it away from us so we could be free from them.

How did Jesus feel about this? Let's look to scripture. Hebrews 10:5, Jesus said, and listen to this – this is powerful ... “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, “Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.” Jesus willingly came, knowing He would be sacrificed for the sins of the people. And because of His sacrifice, we are told in Hebrews 9:14 that the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience from sin, so we may serve God!

Psalm 103:12 speaks as Jesus as our scapegoat. It says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Jesus is our sin sacrifice; He is our scapegoat – His blood covered our inner sins and His death carried our sins far from us. His resurrection is proof that we have forgiveness from our sins. I Corinthians 15:17, “If Christ had not been raised, our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins.” What does that mean?

Remember in Genesis when God told Adam and Eve that when they sinned they would surely die? In the New Testament, we read that the wages of sin is death. These 2 verses say the same thing. And because Jesus took on our sin by the shedding of His blood, we have atonement, or a covering, for our sins and we are able to stay in close relationship with God – because our sin is separated from us. We are not separated from God – our sin is separated from us.

As far as the east is from the west.

God sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I hope this brings a little more clarity to this one verse for you and a lot of hope! Jesus came into the world, of His own choice, to live in human form – to walk the earth, teach God's ways, and obey God in all things. His example on earth shows us how to live; and the sacrifice He made on the cross for our sins, gives us hope, freedom, and a clear conscience, if only we will receive the gift He offers. The gift of His love and forgiveness. And what do we gain? The world! We gain the world.

That's all I have to say today. My brain needs a little more time to absorb this. We have literally looked at the beginning and end of the bible and have made a few pit stops along the way! We have walked the road to Christ.

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May the light of Christ illuminate your pathway, so you always know which way to go; may His grace cover you each day, may you feel His love, sense His presence and may you know the truth of who you are in Him.

Remember, God's word brings hope, freedom, and peace to those who hear it. Send this podcast to someone who needs a word of encouragement today.

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Starting at Go

If you'd like to hear more of my story, you can purchase my book on Amazon – in either book or kindle format. The book is entitled, "The making of a dragonfly, following Christ through the winds of change." You can also purchase it at Walmart.com or barnes&noble.com. You can also visit my website, maryetheleckard.com.

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Thank you for tuning in to the show. This is Mary Ethel Eckard, signing off.