

# The Atonement of Jesus Christ

## Lesson 4

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<b>Purpose</b>	To help class members gain an appreciation for the Atonement of Jesus Christ and its role in enabling us to gain exaltation.
<b>Preparation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Prayerfully study John 1:1–3, 14; 3:16; 2 Nephi 9:7–9, 21–22; Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–18; Moses 4:2.</li><li>2. If it is available, prepare to show “The Mediator,” an eleven-minute segment of <i>Book of Mormon Video Presentations</i> (53911). If the videocassette is not available, prepare to read or tell in your own words the story by Elder Boyd K. Packer in the fourth enrichment activity.</li><li>3. Materials needed:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The pictures Jesus Praying in Gethsemane (picture 4 in the picture section of the manual; 62175; Gospel Art Picture Kit 227); The Crucifixion (62505; Gospel Art Picture Kit 230); Burial of Jesus (62180; Gospel Art Picture Kit 231); The Resurrected Jesus Christ (picture 9 in the picture section of the manual; 62187; Gospel Art Picture Kit 239).</li><li>b. A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member. Continue to encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.</li></ol></li></ol>

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*Note to the teacher*     *The Atonement of Jesus Christ is at the center of the gospel. Through the Atonement, we have the opportunity to repent and gain exaltation. Giving class members an understanding of the Atonement is a challenging assignment that can only be fulfilled with the help of the Spirit. As with all lessons, seek direction from the Spirit as you prepare and teach this lesson (see Teaching—No Greater Call, 13).*

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### **Suggested Lesson Development**

#### **Jesus Christ Gave His Life for Us**

#### **Story**

Using your own words, relate the following true story:

On a cold, wintry day in 1982, an airplane crashed into a bridge in Washington, D.C., and landed in the Potomac River. Most of the people on the plane were killed immediately, but six people got out of the plane and hung on to its tail while two men in a helicopter threw them a life preserver. The water was very cold, and it was hard to hang on to the plane. The rescuers were afraid that the passengers might lose their grip and drown before they could be pulled out and carried to safety. The rescuers noticed that one man seemed to be more alert than the others, so they lowered the life preserver to him. But every time they did this, he passed the life preserver to someone else so the other person could be rescued first. When the other five people were safe, the helicopter went back for the man, but he was gone. (See Roger Rosenblatt, “The Man in the Water,” *Time*, 25 Jan. 1982, 86; see also Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, May 1983, 56.)

- Discussion
- What do you think of this man’s actions? What might you have done in this situation? What Christlike qualities did this man demonstrate?
- Picture presentation
- Display the four pictures of Jesus Christ. Explain that the man in the river did a great thing when he selflessly gave his own life to save the lives of five other people. But Jesus Christ did an even greater thing: he gave his life to save the spiritual lives of everyone on earth. This lesson will discuss Jesus Christ’s role as our Savior.

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### We Need a Savior

Discussion

Ask class members to review what they remember about the Fall from the previous lesson.

Remind class members that because Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both spiritual and physical death came into the world.

- What happens in physical death? (A person’s body is separated from his or her spirit.)
- What happens in spiritual death? (A person is separated from Heavenly Father.)

Explain that without a Savior, both physical death and spiritual death would be permanent. After death our bodies and spirits would be separated forever, and we would be unable to live with Heavenly Father again. But just as the Fall was part of Heavenly Father’s plan, Heavenly Father also planned for us to have a Savior who would overcome both physical and spiritual death.

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### Jesus Christ Was Chosen to Be Our Savior

Scripture discussion

Have one or more class members read aloud John 1:1–3, 14 and Moses 4:2 (you may need to explain that “the Word” in John 1 is used as a name for Jesus Christ). Remind class members that Jesus Christ was with Heavenly Father before the earth was created and that he was chosen in the premortal world to create the earth and become our Savior.

- How was Jesus’ existence on earth different from everyone else’s? Why are these differences important?

Answers may vary, but bring out that Jesus was the Only Begotten Son of Heavenly Father (Heavenly Father was the father of Jesus’ physical body as well as his spirit) and that he was the only person to lead a sinless life on earth. Explain that these two qualities—his Godhood and his sinlessness—were necessary to enable Christ to atone for our sins and be our Savior.

- What does the word *atone* mean? (As used in the scriptures, to atone is to “correct or overcome the consequences of sin” and make “at one” people who have been separated [see “Atonement,” Bible Dictionary, 617].)
- How does Jesus Christ’s Atonement help us become “at one” with Heavenly Father?

Refer to the four pictures shown earlier in the lesson. Explain that eternal law, or justice, requires that whoever violates a law must be punished. Through his

suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and his death on the cross, Jesus Christ took upon himself the punishment for the sins of everyone who ever lived on the earth. Because of this Atonement, we can repent of our sins, be freed from guilt, and be worthy to dwell with Heavenly Father again.

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### Because of Jesus Christ We Can Be Saved If We Repent

Video presentation	<p>Show the video segment “The Mediator.” If the videocassette is not available, read or tell the story in the fourth enrichment activity. Before you start the video or tell the story, you may need to explain that a debtor is someone who borrows or owes money, and a creditor is someone who lends money.</p>
Discussion	<p>After you have shown the video or shared the story, explain that this story is a parable symbolizing our relationship with our Savior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who does the debtor represent? (Each of us.)</li> <li>• What does the creditor represent? (The laws of justice.)</li> <li>• Who does the debtor’s friend represent? (Jesus Christ.)</li> </ul> <p>Explain that when we agreed to come to earth and receive bodies, we knew that we would sometimes make wrong decisions. Our sins are like the debt of the man in the story. The laws of justice demand that our sins be paid for if we are to return to live with Heavenly Father again. Because Jesus was sinless and the Only Begotten Son of Heavenly Father, he was the only one who could atone for our sins and satisfy justice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the story, the mediator (the debtor’s friend) said he would become the debtor’s new creditor. The debt would be repaid on his terms. What terms has Christ set for us? In other words, what must we do to receive all the blessings of Christ’s Atonement?</li> </ul>
Scripture discussion	<p>To help class members find the answer, have three class members each read aloud one of the following scriptures: John 3:16, 2 Nephi 9:21–22, and Doctrine and Covenants 19:16.</p> <p>Explain that because of Christ’s Atonement for us, we are unconditionally saved from physical death. Everyone will be resurrected. But in order to be saved from spiritual death and be with Heavenly Father again, we must believe in Christ, follow and obey him, and repent of our sins.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will happen to us if we do not repent of our sins? (See D&amp;C 19:17–18; we will have to suffer for our own sins.)</li> <li>• What would have happened to the debtor in the story if his friend had not offered to help him? (He would have gone to prison and had all his possessions taken away.) What would happen to us if Jesus Christ had not atoned for us? (See 2 Nephi 9:7–9; we would not be resurrected, and our sins in this life would keep us out of the presence of Heavenly Father forever.)</li> <li>• How do you feel, knowing that Jesus Christ has paid the price for your sins? (Invite class members to answer this question to themselves if they do not wish to share their feelings with the class.)</li> </ul>

## Testimony

Testify of the Savior's love for each class member, which he showed by atoning for our sins. Express your gratitude for his Atonement.

Urge class members to follow Jesus Christ and repent of their sins so they may receive the full blessings of Christ's Atonement.

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## Enrichment Activities

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. Bring to class the front page of a major newspaper in your area. Point out that the front page is reserved for the most important events of the day.

- If a newspaper company released a special issue covering the entire history of the world, what stories do you think would be on the front page?

Have a class member read the following statement from Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

"The wondrous and glorious Atonement was the central act in all of human history" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1985, 93; or *Ensign*, May 1985, 73.)

- Why was the Atonement the most important event in history?
- How can knowing about the Atonement help you deal with the bad news and terrible events that are frequently reported in the newspaper?

2. Help class members memorize the third article of faith.

3. Sing or listen to a recording of "I Stand All Amazed" (*Hymns*, no. 193) or "How Great the Wisdom and the Love" (*Hymns*, no. 195).

4. If the videocassette called for in the lesson is not available, tell the following story by Elder Boyd K. Packer (this is the same story presented on the videocassette):

"Let me tell you a story—a parable.

"There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.

"He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.

"So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn't worry too much about it, for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important.

"The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

"But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full. Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.

“‘I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,’ he confessed.

“‘Then,’ said the creditor, ‘we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.’

“‘Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?’ the debtor begged. ‘Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?’

“The creditor replied, ‘Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?’

“‘I believed in justice when I signed the contract,’ the debtor said. ‘It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.’

“‘It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,’ the creditor replied. ‘That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.’

“There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

“‘If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,’ the debtor pleaded.

“‘If I do, there will be no justice,’ was the reply.

“Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?

“There is a way! The law of justice *can* be fully satisfied and mercy *can* be fully extended—but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

“The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.

“‘I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.’

“As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, ‘You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.’

“And so the creditor agreed.

“The mediator turned then to the debtor. ‘If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?’

“‘Oh yes, yes,’ cried the debtor. ‘You save me from prison and show mercy to me.’

“‘Then,’ said the benefactor, ‘you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.’

“And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.

“The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 79–80; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 54–55).