



# Pastor's Note

## As Far as the East is From the West

One of my favorite parts of the worship service is the Assurance of Pardon. I know that for some, this piece of the service sometimes feels like a piece of liturgy we have to get through in order to get to the “good stuff”, the “important stuff”. I used to think like that, as well. But actually, the Assurance of Pardon should be one of the high points of the service, for it’s a time when we again hear the Gospel. We have entered the service with praise, usually speaking some words from the Psalms. We then sing a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, as we do that, we truly realize what we are doing – entering into the very presence of God – we again become mindful of our sinfulness, of how unworthy we are to come before the Lord. And so, the next thing we do is to pray our confessions to the Lord, including some silent, individual prayer. It’s at this point that I have the great honor and privilege to assure us all of what God has promised us in Scripture: that in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. What wonderful Good News! Is it any wonder that we then burst forth with a “Hallelujah!”?

I use several pieces of Scripture for this assurance, but one of my favorites comes from Psalm 103: “As far as the east is from the west, so far does (God) remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12, ESV). You may not realize it, but *east* is a critical direction in Hebrew thought. The Temple in Jerusalem was built purposefully facing east. The altar of sacrifice was in the easternmost part of the Temple, while the Holy of Holies – the room which held the Ark of the Covenant upon which God was symbolically enthroned – was in the westernmost part of the Temple. Everything, therefore, took place in the Temple in an east-west manner, most especially on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the Jewish year (which typically falls in September – this year, it’s on September 29-30). On this day, the high priest would offer up a sacrifice in the east, and then sprinkle the blood of this sacrifice on the Ark of the Covenant in the west. In this way, the sins of the people were symbolically removed from the east to the west.<sup>1</sup>

Now, you may wonder why all this is important – and the answer is built into the very nature of the earth itself. God programmed this east-west distinction into the very fabric of our universe. For the earth itself even rotates from east to west. Our planet is, rough speaking, a sphere, which turns on an invisible axis in an east-west manner. This means that our world has a north pole and a south pole – but no east pole or west pole. In other words, one can measure the distance from north to south: I just did a quick Google search, which informed me that it is 12,430 miles from one pole to the other. If God had told us that He removed our sins from us *as far as the north is from the south*, then we could attach a finite distance to that figure: 12,430 miles. But there is no way to measure how far the east is from the west; that’s an infinite distance. In fact, in the Hebrew language, the word for east, *kedem*, also means “everlasting.”

In other words, as Messianic rabbi Jonathan Cahn has written, “So in Messiah, how far does God remove your sins from you? An infinity away . . . an eternity away. And if you had all eternity, you could never find them again.”<sup>2</sup> Folks, that’s Good News! Because sometimes we go looking for our sins again, don’t we? We think that God has just tucked them away for a bit, and that He’s just waiting to throw them back in our face. But the Scriptures tell us differently; they say that just as the high priest traveled from east to west on the Day of Atonement, symbolically removing the sins of the people from them, so now has Jesus fulfilled that task. On the cross, by His blood, He has removed our sins from us in reality – and they are as far away from us as the east is from the west. Hallelujah!

So the next time you come to worship, and we get to the Assurance of Pardon, be sure to drink in the wonderful Good News of your complete, total, and utter forgiveness. Savor this assurance of forgiveness – that in Jesus Christ, your sins are an infinity distance away from you, and they will never find you again. And then sing your “Hallelujahs!” to Him for washing you clean, and making you new! To Him alone be the glory!

In Christ’s Love,

*Joshua*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries*. (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2016), devotion for Day 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.