

Sermon October 10, 2021 Leviticus Part IV

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the fourth chapter of the Old Testament book of Leviticus, we find God's instructions on the sin offering. Here is an overview of those instructions:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying ... "If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the Lord, and the bull shall be killed before the Lord. Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord in front of the veil. And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the Lord, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. Thus shall he do with the bull. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.

"When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the Lord his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish ... So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

"If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed ... And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. Leviticus 4

At the outset of this series, it was pointed out that God is in the process of making holy those things which are profane and making clean those things that are unclean. One problem with all of that is, just like with our automobiles, dishes, and clothes, what is clean keeps getting dirty again! God established a series of offerings for his people to deal with this matter. The sin offerings described above were to bring forgiveness and cleansing when people sinned unintentionally – priests, leaders, the whole community, or regular folks like us.

What are we New Testament believers to do about sin? Well, we hear a lot about that in the Bible don't we. We look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. Yet it is remarkable how the Old Testament sin offering compares so closely with Jesus Christ. St. Paul says we are saved, "... through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Romans 3) The word Paul uses here translated as "propitiation" is the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for "sin offering." The connection between the sin offerings in the Old Testament and what Jesus Christ did is clear. But, as we might expect, we get a bit more value in the offering of himself that Jesus made than the animals back in ancient times. Those animals purified people's bodies so they could approach the tent of meeting to worship God. With Jesus, we are cleansed on both the outside and the inside.

" ... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9

Earl Nightingale began his professional career as a plastic surgeon. He worked with people whose faces had either been damaged in an accident or whose faces weren't right from birth. Dr. Nightingale ran into something totally unexpected with his patients – especially with women. He straightened their noses, rebuilt ears, lips, and repaired other deformities. When the healing was complete, he removed the bandages. He excitedly put a mirror in front of them so they could see how much better they looked. Many of his patients thought they still looked

ugly. This puzzled him to no end. Dr. Nightingale realized the problem. No amount of external beautification mattered if the patient still had a poor internal self-image. He changed the direction of his career towards helping people fix the image they saw when they looked inside themselves.

Jesus changes the image we see when we look inside ourselves. The New Testament word for “sin” means to “miss the mark.” It’s a term they borrowed from archery. When we look inside ourselves, we can’t even count how many times we have missed the mark. All those misses add up and make us feel bad about ourselves, guilty, and like those patients of Dr. Nightingale – ugly. Jesus changes all that.

... since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Heb 10:21-22

In baptism our bodies have been washed in the pure water of God’s holiness. In the Lords Supper the blood of Christ – the great high priest - is sprinkled on us and we are cleansed from every sin, every mark that we have missed. We are wholly loved and accepted by our Father in heaven, and we can go to him for his embrace at any time.

Those Old Testament sin offerings dealt with sins the people were guilty of by accident. They did not deal with things they did on purpose. Compare that with what John says here in his first epistle.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Jesus forgives us and cleanses us of everything – what we should have done or should not have done, both what we are aware of and what we aren’t. John takes it even further as he writes in the next chapter;

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2

“Propitiation” here is the same word as in the Greek New Testament for the atoning offering, the sin offering of high priest. Here, too, John brings out the evangelistic nature of the work of Jesus. He gave himself as a once and for all sin offering not just for us who are already in his church, but for everyone in the world. The good news is there to be delivered to the rest of the world who have not heard of God’s call to repentance and his saving work in his Son Jesus Christ. How important for us to support that effort!

This is as far as I am going to go with the instructions given in Leviticus for the offerings God prescribed. Next week I hope to give some insight into the forms and structure of the services the priests and people engaged in at the tabernacle. Hopefully it will shed some light on our worship practices today and give added depth to what goes on in our Divine Services here in God’s house. Until then the Lord bless, strengthen, and encourage you as together we patiently await the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells. Amen.

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