

Leviticus 16

“The Day of Atonement” December 30, 2012

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What’s your greatest problem? And does it define who you are?

Is your greatest problem your professor and the next paper or exam? Is it your boss or even you spouse? Is it a past relationship that still haunts you? Do you fear losing your job or being evicted from your house? Is your greatest problem bigger and more serious? Like life and death. Have you lost a dear friend, mom, dad, brother, sister or perhaps you have lost a son or daughter? Or do you have a sickness or cancer that brings the reality of death to the forefront of your thoughts? Do you blame others or your parents, your upbringing or the economy for your problems?

I want to suggest that here is something more fundamental that is ultimately shaping or causing these previously mentioned difficulties or problematic circumstances?

I think that our greatest problem is the same problem that every generation has faced from the beginning. It’s the problem of sin. It is far reaching and has effects on us and this world that are greater than we probably understand. But God has given us his Word that we might know our greatest problem and the solution to that problem.

In Genesis we see that God created the world and said that it was good. In fact of all his creation he said that his creating of man and woman were VERY GOOD. But then Adam and Eve rebelled against God and changed the course of history. They had now introduced SIN into the world. As a result God being a good, holy and just god removed Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Their relationship with the holy God was forever changed. They no longer communed with God. He no longer existed with them in the Garden b/c they were banished due to their sin.

We see the same thing as we move through the Bible. Sin multiplies and God in his just wrath punishes sin. He does this as sin multiplies and he sends a flood only saving Noah. God also punishes the people in Genesis when they seek to make a name for themselves when they come together to build the Tower of Babel and he confuses their language. God was continually patient and continued to show grace and mercy.

God has also watched over his people and provided for Abraham and his family during a worldwide famine through Joseph in Egypt. But when God led the nation of Israel out of Egypt they failed to obey Him in the desert. God gave them the law or the 10 commandments as a guide by which to live their life. The law was intended to be a guide for the people and show them their need of God. But once they received the Commandments their sin increased. They grumbled and complained; they spurned God and his provision for their lives. They even longed to return to their days in Egypt.

As we come to the book of Leviticus the story picks up at the point of Israel’s history when God gave them specific commands in the book of Exodus. He gave them the 10 commandments. He gave them instructions on building the tabernacle. And then in Leviticus 1-15 He gave them commands on how to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now we come to Leviticus 16 as God tells Moses how and when Aaron and the high priests can draw near to God and make sacrifices for himself, his family and the nation.

The Point: See your need of cleansing from sin through the atonement.

I. See That Sin Has Separated You From God

In Ch. 16 sin is assumed as normative. There is no definition of sin or detailed theology of sin that carries on for verses and chapters. Instead from the very first verses we see the consequences of sin and the remedy for sin. You see sin as the greatest need of the people. Israel was supposed to be a people set apart to God. A nation, a people who treasured God. Instead you see a description of what we know as the Day of Atonement. The Jews still celebrate this today. It is called Yom Kippur literally meaning “The Day of

Atonements.” This was the height of the sacrificial system for the year. The people were continually making sacrifices and burnt offerings throughout the year but The Day of Atonement occurred once a year and was the pinnacle of the sacrificial system for Israel. This was the only day that the high priest was able to enter the Most Holy Place (sometimes called the Holy of Holies). And as we will see it is where atonement is made for the people. Sin has affected the relationship between the people of Israel and their God. They are now considered unclean before a holy God.

But what is sin? Why is Israel considered unclean? What have they done to bring uncleanness upon themselves? In short they have failed to love the one true God above all else. Sin is a violation of God’s commands. It is easy to think of God as one who loves and forgives but he is also a God who desires obedience and submission to himself. It is precisely this failure to submit and rebellion toward God that brings about a distorted relationship. Sin causes you to be unclean before God.

Our sin earns us consequences. Similar to going to work. You help your company achieve its goals and you are rewarded. You show up to work and do your job to the best of your ability and you earn a paycheck. In a very similar way our actions earn us a paycheck or our reward. The Bible in Romans tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It also tells us that due to our sin we have earned death. But you say well that can’t be true b/c we are still here. If I sin and have earned death then why am I still here today and not dead. Does that mean that I am without sin b/c I have not received death? No. This death is a spiritual death of which you are already experiencing a small foretaste of what true and everlasting death will be like. But you do also experience God’s blessing now of which will one day cease upon physical death. This death is an eventual death that is a total separation from God. That is what makes Hell, hell.

Sin isn’t just something like **murder** or **adultery** or robbing a bank. We all would associate those as sin, but it also **includes anything that is contrary to God, even in the smallest degree**. In The Screwtape Letters C.S. Lewis’ character Screwtape says this, *“The only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one.”*

In Lev. 16 we see mentioned in the first verses the sin of Aaron’s two sons (Nadab and Abihu) have earned them immediate death b/c they approach God with inappropriate fire. We don’t know exactly what this was or looked like, but looking at Leviticus 10 we learn that they approached the presence of God inappropriately. Their consequence was immediate death. Even before the death of Aaron’s sons we saw the death of Pharaoh’s son in the initial Passover that led to the release of Israel. There have always been consequences to sin and rebellion toward a holy and righteous God. We will also see that uncleanness and separation from God are consequences of sin. God hates sin.

Read and then explain Leviticus 16.

Verses 1-10

Bull- sin offering for Aaron and his family

Goat- sin offering for the people

Sacrificial-

Scapegoat (some translations Azazel)- RSV, ESV, ASV

Azazel- KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV

1. Proper Name- referring to an unknown demon or place
2. Scapegoat- thought to be a compound word combining “goat” and “going away” meaning “goat that goes away.” Either way **the meaning and significance is not effected in that it is clear that the scapegoat is being sent out in order to take sin away from Israel**

Verses 11-19

So Aaron sacrifices the bull and brings its blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat or the atonement cover. But he was not allowed in there without the burning incense to act as a cloud and keep him from seeing the presence of God

clearly. He did the same thing with the blood of the goat in atoning for the sins of the people.

It is important to see how the author over and over repeats uncleanness, sin and blood.

Hebrews 9:7 says, “but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking, blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.” **This shed blood was atoning for the sins of the people.**

Verses 20-28

Scapegoat- bearing the sins of the people is taken away from the people and released in the wilderness.

Burnt Offerings- the rams from verses 3 and 5 are offered for both the priest and the people but only after the sin offering so that the people are considered clean before God

Verses 29-34

“afflict yourselves” or “deny yourselves”- meaning to fast or humble yourself; God desires a contrite and humble heart before him; sorrow for sin against God.

II. You Have a Need of Cleansing Through an Atoning Sacrifice

You have a need of cleansing because God hates sin.

Read Psalm 5:4-6

“⁴For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. ⁵The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. ⁶You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

God punishes sin because he is holy and he is just. But you might argue that God isn't being very loving by punishing those who don't love him.

Any other time you cry for justice. When your co-worker takes credit for something that you had a big part in you cry for justice. You want to make sure that your boss knows which part of the project was your's, especially when you have done something good.

What if your boss is constantly telling people that it is important for you to be on time, but there is one person that is late every single day. It doesn't matter if the weather is good. It doesn't matter if the weather is bad. This one person is late every day and they walk right past the boss's office on the way to their desk. They even have the gall to say hi as they walk past the boss's office. Yet there is no recourse. Your co-worker never suffers any consequences.

What about the bully from school who has picked on kids in his class for years and no one has stood up to him because he is a head taller than everyone else. And then finally one kid has had enough after 3 years of being bullied and fights back. The bully loses his dignity and his ability to intimidate everyone when the kid beats the bully up.

We rejoice when this happens. We are angry when the boss doesn't take action on the co-worker is consistently late. We cheer when the bully is stood up to. We yearn for justice. But when it comes to matters of life and death we somehow put God in a box and call him unjust when he delivers justice to those who have continually rejected him.

How does your continual rebellion and rejection of God and his ways affect you? What have you earned in your rebellion? You who desire justice so much rebel against God. What do you deserve?

Because of sin the people were not able to approach God. There was only one person that was allowed to approach God and this was only one time a year and in a very specific way. The high priest had to wash himself and then put on linen clothes before approaching God. He had to sacrifice a bull for himself and a goat for the people. And when approaching God with the blood of the bull and the goat the high priest had to have incense burning so that he was unable to see the presence of God. Not even the priest was able to

fully see the presence of God or he would risk death. But God was making a way for his presence to reside with his people through these sacrifices of atonement.

So what is this atonement? And what does it accomplish?

The atonement as we see it here in the text is meant to *cleanse the offender and restore the relationship between God and man. To make atonement for sin is to have the penalty paid and the guilt removed.*

What type of atonement is this?

Theories- this is referring to how God accomplished atonement through the cross

-Moral Influence- One way of putting it includes *“the view that the sight of the selfless Christ dying for sinners moves us to repentance and faith. If God will do all that for us, we say, then we ought not to continue in sin. So we repent and turn from it and are saved by becoming better people.”*

-Christ is Conqueror- stresses the victory over death, sin and the devil that atonement accomplished. This simply says that Christ is stronger there for he has won. This is true but not completely satisfying the biblical witness of the atonement.

-Satisfaction Theory- sees sin as such an affront to God that only on who is both God and man can remedy the problem. Commendable but too restricted in scope.

-The Penal-Substitution Theory: This view was formulated as an extension of the Satisfaction theory. The Satisfaction theory was correct in introducing the satisfaction aspect of Christ's work and its necessity, however it is insufficient because it was referenced to God's honor rather than his justice and holiness and was couched more in terms of a commercial transaction than a penal substitution. This view says simply that Christ died for man, in man's place, taking his sins and bearing them for him. The bearing of man's sins takes the punishment for them and sets the believer free from the penal demands of the law: The righteousness of the law and the holiness of God are satisfied by this substitution (Is. 53:4-6; Luke 22:37; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24).

But these sacrifices are imperfect. They had to be offered year after year because the people were in a state of sin. They continued to sin even after this atoning sacrifices and forgiveness of God.

Read Rom. 5:18-19

¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Sin came entered through Adam and has affected us all. But it is through the second man, Christ, that all may have redemption and be made righteous.

Read Heb. 10:1-14

¹For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' ⁸When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

¹³waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Christ is like the high priest in that he goes before God making atonement for us. But he is unlike the high priest in that he is also the sacrificial lamb who shed his own blood for you and I. Christ laid down his life that we might have life and be reconciled to God. He is also our scapegoat in that he carries our sins away. Christ is the perfect sacrifice. No other person in history or any other religion claims for its god to make a way for men to be with him in the afterlife. Only Immanuel, God with us, has come and made a way for us to be with him forever. And he doesn't continually die year after year. He has died once for all.

For all who believe in him, he has forgiven their sins and has made you righteous before God.

III. Rest in the Atonement

The Perfect Sacrifice Restores Perfectly

-Christ the perfect, sinless sacrifice perfectly restores us into a right relationship with God

Read Lev. 16:29-34 again

John Sailhamer says this about the text.

“Central to the rituals and holy actions is the concept of atonement...the book of Leviticus assumes that the only just penalty for a blatant act of disobedience to God's will is death (cf. Gen 2:17). It also takes for granted that human beings have gone astray from God's way and have sought their own means of finding blessing...Though this book never mentions it, there was a latent inequity in its system of sacrifices...This same theme is picked up in the New Testament: 'It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Heb. 10:4). These sacrifices thus served more as a reminder of sin and the need for atonement than as an actual removal of guilt. They had to be repeated regularly to cover the guilt of the people. Thus something more was necessary to make atonement permanent. That something more, as the New Testament teaches, comes “through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10).

You can rest in the atonement knowing that you can do nothing to earn the favor of God. Christ has gone before us and made a way. It is through Christ's sacrifice that God the just justifies us. God is both loving and just in his pardoning his children by the blood of the Lamb, that is Christ, and judging the wicked according to their deeds. The picture of the cross is a free offer to all who would follow Him. Can you say with Joshua? “Choose you this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”(Joshua 24:15)

Your greatest need is not a six-figure salary. It isn't a good family life. It is not the comforts of this life.

“The Day of Atonement was the most important day of the year because it dealt with the people's most important problem: sin.” (Ryken and Ryken, ESV Literary Study Bible)

God in Christ has reconciled to himself those who would believe in him. Christ is our sacrifice. Trust in him!