

The Day of Atonement

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. Please send your Bibles back to Leviticus 16. We're continuing our series that we left off last year, I think.
- And even though our reading was only up to verse 22, we're going to cover the whole passage. Well, Hannah and I have some friends.
- Hannah is my wife. I have some friends who have two young boys. And several years ago, we visited their house. At that time, they only had one boy, the eldest.
- And generally speaking, he was very good. He's still very good. He's not naughty. But one time when we were there, he did something naughty. So his mom called him over.
- He knew that he was going to get a scolding. So he walked down the hallway crying and said, I can't be a good boy all the time. Well, you've heard the saying, out of the mouth of babes, this little boy has rightly diagnosed the human condition.
- [1 : 16] We can't be good boys all the time. We can't be good all the time. No one is perfect. That's the saying. But there is a paradox in this world. Everyone knows that they're not perfect.
- But when people confess their weaknesses and their sins, they get judgmental stares. Or they become social outcasts.
- Or they get canceled these days. But with God, we meet a totally different attitude. In our passage, we will see that God is holy.
- He's the only one in this world, in fact, who truly cannot tolerate sins. But we will also see that when we own up to our sins and we lament and repent from them and come to him for forgiveness, he's ready to meet us with graciousness because he longs for us and desires to live with us.
- In this passage, we see God's abounding and continual gracious mercy. And for sinners, me included, this passage is such good news.
- [2 : 28] The passage starts with a background of the event in verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord.
- This reminds us of what happens in chapter 10 of the same book. Aaron's two sons, who were priests, died straight after their ordination because they were not careful in approaching the holy presence of God.
- So the passage starts with a reminder of sin and of the barrier that exists between the holy God and the sinful people.
- Even the priests have to be careful because they could not escape from sin. For chapter after chapter in the book of Leviticus, the Israelites were given instructions to be holy.
- They were given opportunities to live holy and they still failed. Even the priests failed. Like my friend's son, they can't be good boys all the time.
- [3 : 41] So is there hope then for living with a holy and good God all the time? With our gracious God, there is.

In verse 2, even after that horrible tragedy, God tells Moses to say to Aaron that he still allows them to come and draw near.

It's just that they have to do it carefully because God is holy. And at the end of verse 2, God will still appear on the atonement cover, that is, on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, to show that he is still present among Israel.

But the presence of God's holiness means that approaching him must be done carefully. So out of grace, God gives them a way to enter his presence.

And that is the day of atonement, which is the point of the passage. One day per year, where one man, the high priest, could enter the Holy of Holies, if he did all the details outlined in the rest of the passage.

[5 : 00] So let's go through all these details, because they tell us so much about our sin and God's grace. Well, the ritual starts with the preparation of sin offerings.

That's the tabernacle. The tabernacle is God's tent, and it was set up in the middle of the Israelites' camp. And so the sins of Israel defiled the place.

So before the high priest could enter to meet with God, the place had to be cleansed through these offerings.

So in verse 3 and 6, Aaron, the high priest, is told to bring a young bull and a ram for atoning his own sins and those of his household, the priests.

And then in verse 5, to aton for the sins of the people, Aaron is to take two goats and a ram.

[6 : 05] And then he is to slaughter these animals as sin and burnt offerings, which we have covered last year, to atone for their sins.

Now if we jump to verse 11 to 13, after slaughtering these animals, Aaron is to enter the Holy of Holies, the innermost part of the tabernacle where God dwells, dangerous area, and so he is to bring the blood of the sacrifice and a censer of burning coals.

This is so that the smoke of coals would cover the tabernacle, so that when God appears, the high priest, Aaron, doesn't see the Holy God and die.

Again, we see here, there is a separation, a barrier between the Holy God and the sinful people. And then in verse 14 to 19, Aaron shall sprinkle the blood of the slaughtered animals on the cover of the ark, and then on the tent, on the tabernacle, and then on the altar.

This is to cleanse God's place that has been tainted by the sins of the Israelites. Now our modern brains might wonder, it's a bit ironic that they use blood for cleansing.

[7 : 36] Blood just makes things dirtier, doesn't it? But it's a spiritual cleansing. We know that the payment of sin is death. A person who sins has to pay with their life.

And the blood symbolizes life. So to cleanse the sin, blood is needed. And in this scenario, it's the blood of goats and bulls. And that's why, if we look at the next chapter, Leviticus 17, the commandment there is to not eat blood.

Don't eat blood, because life is in the blood. And blood is to be used for atonement, the Old Testament. So here, at least up to this point, we can begin to see the extent of sin.

Sin is the barrier between humans and the Holy God. Sin demands a payment of life. It's not a trivial thing. And sin is not just private.

It affects the place where we live and the people around us. It's like mold in your fridge. It starts on one piece of bread, and then it spreads to the whole loaf, and then it spreads to other things in the fridge.

[9 : 03] There's no, you do you, or you do what you want, as long as you're not hurting anyone else when it comes to sin. Sin always harms not only us, also our surroundings.

We've heard about systemic sin, sin that makes social systems broken, or generational sins. We do sinful things to our kids.

They do, in turn, they do sinful things to their kids, and so on. Sin always harms our surroundings. And the Israelites knew this.

And God graciously gave them a way to overcome sin, not only privately, but also communally. We see here, not only the extent of our sins, but also the extent of God's graciousness.

We can see that through looking at what happens to the two goats. In verse 5, the people are required to provide two goats for sin offering.

[10 : 18] Actually, in verse 15, only one is slaughtered. What happens to the other one? Well, that's because in verse 7 to 10, Aaron is to cast lots for the two goats.

One is to be slaughtered, and the other is to be the scapegoat. Aaron is then to put his hands on the scapegoat's head, confess all Israelite sins, it says in verse 21, all of their sins.

So, all their sins are placed on the goat's head, and the scapegoat is to be carried to the wilderness, be thrown away, passed out from the midst of Israel, never to be seen again, forgotten by God.

It reminds us of what a psalm says, our transgressions are thrown far away from east as far as east is. This is a powerful image.

Can you imagine being there on a day of atonement and watching as the high priest slaughters the first goat in your place because of your sins?

[11 : 38] You pay for your sins through the death of the goat instead of your own? and then watching your sins be put on the other goat's head and be thrown away, all of them, all of your sins, never to be seen anymore.

Your sins are forgiven, forgotten by God. Can you see how great God is? And then the high priest enters the tabernacle on your behalf, unscathed, welcomed by the holy, gracious God.

And what's the people's role in all this? Almost nothing. Verse 17 makes it clear. Only one person enters the high priest.

No one else does. He makes the atonement for everyone. He takes the risk if he does something wrong and he enters. Anyone has to die. It's him. And in verse 29 to 31 the people are not even allowed to work on that day.

There's no place for work in their atonement. Everything is done for them. there is a place for repentance.

[13 : 04] In verse 29 there the people are to deny themselves. What does that mean to deny themselves? Well in Psalm 35 that same expression occurs again.

I wore sackcloth. I humbled myself. That is denied myself. It's the same in Hebrew with fasting. I went about mourning.

I bowed my head in grief. So perhaps on the day of atonement as well even though they're not allowed to do anything they fasted and prayed in repentance as a form of denying themselves.

The people need to recognize their sins and the extent of them. They need to lament over their sins and watch as God offers them forgiveness through the atoning sacrifice.

So here in our passage we see the great extent of sin how it spreads to the place and the people around us how it puts a barrier for us to live in God's place.

[14 : 17] We also see the depth of God's grace grace how he's always ready to forgive and welcome us to live with him.

Here comes the problem. Humans can never be free of sins, can they? No one is perfect. Right after the day of the atonement ended, the Israelites would have walked back right into their sins.

and that's why in verse 32 to 33 by the end of our passage God commands not only Aaron to do this, also all high priests after him for generations.

And in verse 34 God commands that the day of atonement be done every single year. Offerings needed to be done repeatedly for generations because humans always sin repeatedly.

God was so gracious to them to allow these repeated offerings but repetitions mean no finalization. When does it end? Is there hope for a final atonement that is sufficient enough to erase all sins, past, present, and future?

[15 : 44] Yes, there is and we find that final atonement in Jesus. In Hebrews 9 we read Nor did he, that is Jesus, enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood that is not his own.

Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin, to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

We celebrated this last week, didn't we? The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the Lamb of God on that first good Friday. There we see the extent of our sin and the depth of God's grace.

Our sin is so bad that it required the death of the Son of God himself. But God's grace is so deep that he's willing to pay the price for us, once for all.

on that good Friday, we see Jesus taking the role of the two goats from our passage. Jesus is the goat of the sin offering. He is the final offering that cleanses our sins, past, present, and future, once and for all.

[17 : 28] Jesus is also the scapegoat, on whose head we put all our sins, all of them, which he brought down to the wilderness, that is, to death.

never to be seen or remembered again. But that's not the final thing that Jesus did.

In our second reading from Hebrews 9, we read, when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands.

That is to say, it's not part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

Jesus did not just die on the cross, he rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven. That's what we just said in the creed. He entered God's most holy place, literally, and presented himself there to the father as the perfect, sufficient, once for all sacrifice.

[18 : 48] And that's what he's doing right now. Jesus is standing, sitting right next to the father as our high priest. So Jesus is not only the final sacrifice, he's also the final high priest, the one man who enters the holy of holies and offers the sacrifice of himself.

And as Hebrews 7 says, he's currently right there next to God as our high priest interceding, that is praying for us.

Every time we sin, which we do a lot, because we can't be good boys all the time. If we follow Jesus, Jesus is up there praying for us.

Lord, forgive Ricky. I have died for him. Tears of my flesh. We don't need to pay for it using an animal's blood or our blood, because Jesus is right there praying for us and presenting himself as the final offering for our sins.

As a great hymn reminds us, Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within my sins.

[20 : 20] I don't look inward. Upward I look and see him there who made an end to all my sins. God is praying for me.

He is praying for you and for me as our high priest and all our sins are forgiven because he lives forever to present to God his sufficient once and for all death.

his ministry still doesn't end there. In the Old Testament here in our passage, only the high priest could enter God's presence.

In Jesus, we all can enter God's presence through him because he's not just the final sacrifice.

He's not just the final high priest. priest is also the final curtain through which we enter into God's presence. As Hebrews 10 says, Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain, that is his body.

[21 : 47] What that means? That means every time we pray in Jesus' name, we're not just sending love letters to God in heaven, we spiritually enter the throne room of God and talk to him through Jesus.

Every time we gather in Jesus' name, we spiritually enter the throne room of God and worship him through Jesus.

every time we take the holy communion in Jesus' name, lifting up our hearts to where he is, we spiritually enter the throne room of God feast with him in Jesus.

And all this is possible only because of what Jesus has done for us. What grace! is no wonder Charles Wesley sang, and can it be that I should gain an interest in Savior's blood?

This passage in Leviticus 16 shows so much of God's gracious mercy, but in Jesus, we receive so much more, so much more.

[23 : 08] And what's our role in all this? It's the same, it's almost nothing, except lamenting over our sins, repenting, letting our sins be attained for by Jesus, spiritually looking at him, entering the Holy of Holies to present his eternal once and for all sacrifice, and enjoying the benefits, having the confidence that Jesus is there right next to the Father, praying for you and for me.

So perhaps we should use this privilege to draw near, shouldn't we? We have the access through Jesus to enter God's presence, unlike the Israelites, why not use it?

let's draw near into God's presence through prayers in Jesus' name, meditations of the word, partaking in the Holy Communion, attending church.

In Hebrews 10, after saying that we have confidence to draw near, the author encourages us to not give up meeting together, because that's one of the ways that we draw near to God, through church, we are the body of Jesus, through his body we draw near.

We have been given all these gifts through the ministry of Jesus, our high priest. Let's not waste them, let's use them to commune with God who loves us.

[24 : 58] this past week, my parents have been here, visiting from Indonesia, that's because like Andrew said, my second son is born, name is Esa, easier, rather than Yesaya, and for months, Kai, my first born, was separated from them.

They live in Indonesia, he could only chat to them through video calls, but he was separated from them. There's this barrier. When they arrived in Melbourne on Wednesday, I woke Kai up at 6.45 in the morning, he was grumpy.

When I said to him, you want to go back to sleep, or come with me to pick up grandma and grandpa at the airport, immediately he said, pick up grandma and grandpa.

And he was so happy to see them. And now every single day, every time after he wakes up, he looks for them and never neglects the opportunity to play with them.

He drags them from whatever they're doing, cooking, whatever, he drags them and says, play, cast. Are we like that with God?

[26 : 29] Do we love him so much that when the barrier between us and him is removed by Jesus, we use every opportunity to commune with him in and through Jesus?

Because as our passage shows, and as Jesus shows, God is gracious, merciful, he loves us, and he desires to be with us.

How much do we desire him? Let's pray. and do we know how much