

## Jesus Christ - the fulfilment of the sin offering

Today's look at Leviticus brings us face to face with a very real, difficulty: how can flawed, morally and spiritually weak and failing people maintain and enjoy relationship with the living God?

### Reading: Leviticus 4:1-12

- These folks had been sheltered from God's judgement at Passover – liberated – now special relationship with God.
- But God realist: "**If anyone sins...**" - the anointed priest, the whole crowd, an individual leader, an ordinary, 'untitled' person.
- Same theme in NT: 1 John 2:1-3

I've struggled with this – met many Christians who have!

- Heard the message of Christ: responded – admitted personal guilt – accepted the provision God has made in Christ: personally committed to Christ
- **but** initial relief/freedom/joy greatly curtailed by the discovery: I still sin! So what happens now? Does God say it doesn't matter? (How could he?) If it does matter: what do I do? Penance? Or is there nothing and I am simply rejected?

### NB – a good sign in one sense to have this struggle:

- perhaps a time when we had little awareness: not really troubled by our sin – or perhaps only by BIG sins!
- when you encounter Christ – can be uncomfortable: wakes us up to reality of what we are really like – has to, otherwise at best we would want Christ as a life coach, or as a friend when we need him: but not as a Saviour
- so – need to understand that we all are deeply infected with the moral and spiritual disease of sin:
- its **symptoms** are many: obvious acts of gross cruelty, hatred – or the many less obvious but no less deadly indications: spite, greed, jealousy, moral weakness – all kinds of irrational behaviour – hurting others and ourselves in the process – going against the moral and spiritual laws of the universe, against the sanctities of human life, of human sexuality
- its **underlying cause** is rebellion against the Creator, to be independent; choosing to go our own way

But **now aware**: a good sign – indicates that it is more than mere religion: salvation is working in us! But if we don't know how to handle this awareness it could prove crippling for us.

### If any one sins... the OT provision: the Sin Offering

- or 'purification offering' - like the others: a **prototype** or picture in advance of the sacrifice of Christ:
- animal sacrifices could never take away sin – they are not moral or spiritual beings: these sacrifices pointed to the one true sacrifice of Christ – as 1 Corinthians 15 tells us: **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**
- Hebrews 13:10-14 explicitly links, and compares sin offering in Leviticus 4 and the death of Christ.

One of 5 sacrifices: some of the others were also connected to atonement for sin: **what's the difference? What's special?**

- NB – how the word **ALL** is used – what it is used with
  - Burnt Offering: ALL the sacrifice

- Meal/grain: ALL the frankincense offered to God
- Peace Offering: ALL the fat offered to God – the very best of the sacrifice
- With the **sin offering** the word ALL is placed with **blood**: the sin offering concentrates especially on the blood of the sacrifice.
- NT (Hebrews) points out that under the law, the very tabernacle had to be cleansed by blood :
  - Leviticus 16 - sacrifice of the day of atonement – blood brought throughout tabernacle to cleanse it – the horns of the altar, the veil etc
  - why? **because of the uncleanness of the people all around it**: they defiled the Tabernacle because of their sin
- **The key points:**
  - **sin stains: it defiles, pollutes – morally and spiritually:**
  - **the blood of the sacrifice** deals with the stain of sin.

#### **NT: what happens if a person sins?**

- John says: “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us from sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- When we sin we don’t have to keep bringing another sacrifice. Christ offered himself once for all to cover my sin.
  - Hebrews tells us that there is no longer any more offering – i.e. we don’t have to keep offering. It is finished.
- The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.

**Question/objection: a bit too easy?** Does sin not really matter that much? Does it mean that sin doesn’t much matter any more?

- Of course it does. It still stains, it defiles our conscience – and we are now even more aware of it!
  - makes us uneasy – hard to come and talk with God when we know that a few minutes ago lost our temper, thinking bad thoughts, or said some things that we shouldn’t.
  - makes us want to do something to make up for it – somehow we would feel better if we went out and did some practical acts of service, for example. Then we could return and feel better.
- That would be to commit a fundamental but very common mistake: the mistake of thinking there is something we can do to cleanse our consciences
  - only the blood of Christ, token of his life given as sacrifice for our sin – only that can deal with our guilt
  - Hebrews 9:14 – if the blood of these ancient sacrifices could make people ceremonially clean, **“how much more will the blood of Christ purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God”**
- Talking here to Christians - or at least to those who claim to be - we are called to serve God in the whole of our lives – as individuals as a church
  - Yet – the very best of our service is defiled, stained with sin: wrong motives, selfishness, pride, self-reliance, - at our holiest moments we are tainted with sin: we do things we shouldn’t do – we leave undone things we should do
- God has made a provision for us as failing people whose consciences get defiled and stained: the blood of Christ – the only basis not only for knowing God but for serving him.

Let’s take this a little deeper by looking at some of the OT details

- There were several grades of sacrifice according as to whether it was the priest who sinned, or the whole congregation, or a leader, or one of the ordinary people.
- For us – if we are believers in Christ – **we are all priests: all have access to God:**

- **We don't have animal sacrifices to offer – we come in the merit of the sacrifice of Christ**
- **But called upon to serve him and give ourselves as living sacrifices.**
- So let's follow what happened when an anointed priest sinned.

**It involved the man in a symbolic journey.**

1. Started at the altar
2. Then inside tent: veil – sprinkle blood before it
3. Then turn and put blood on the horns of the incense altar
4. Then back to the altar where he started
5. Finally – takes the animal outside and burns it.

**1. The altar**

- a *young* bullock: full of life and energy and potential: not an old animal, getting tired. He had to kill it – not offer it, but kill it – hard not to experience a sense of loss, of waste - graphic **illustration that sin is a killer**
- we see it with Christ? Why did he die? Amongst the reasons – Mark tells us that men in positions of power/responsibility delivered him up to death out of sheer envy! Sometimes when young – what's the harm? Everyone does it! Sin kills.
- And forgiveness is costly: cost the life of the Son of God – a life which had the greatest potential of any life - cut down in his prime because of the sin of the world/my sin.
- Should awaken a positive hatred of sin – of doing anything that caused the death of Christ. Young folks don't play with it – forgiveness is real, but sin damages – see what it did to Christ.

**2. At the veil**

God didn't make him stay outside for a week, then wait just inside the door: but right up to the veil!  
Not a gradual re-admittance.

- Encouraging – natural inclination of many: not really fit for God today – better stay out in the cold; better stay at a distance – until I am feeling a bit better about myself and feel fit to come
- But – do we ever deserve to come? Do we ever come to God because we haven't sinned? Never once have I come to God and deserved to be there!
- God loved us while we were still sinners – and loves us still! This is the safest place on earth – as we feel the stain of our sin – as the tears of failure well up – as our hearts our pierced by his holiness: he welcomes us. He will rebuke our sin, but at the same time he welcomes us into his presence.
- Not because God has gone soft on sin – he has found a way – a costly way – of making it possible for us to come

Important to come – see the beauty of the veil: its colour, its intricate embroidery, the cherubim etc

- NT tells us it is a symbol of Christ's humanity – perfect, fabulously beautiful – no flaws in the embroidery, no holes etc.
- God's way of changing us – getting us to look at and begin to imitate his Son.
- Sometimes when we sin we get so preoccupied with our sin – perhaps we need to keep quiet and stop talking about ourselves, and instead talk about something beautiful, talk about Jesus. The very beauty of it might get you to forget yourself and may even begin to change you.

And then the priest had to splash the blood before it!

- Once more we are reminded – that lovely life was torn apart on a cross.
- We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ – so let's think about how we live.

### 3. At the incense altar

The place where the priest came to pray for the people – put blood on the horns of this altar.

- We also have someone to pray for us: John tells us: if anyone sins we have an advocate with the father.
- Not only did Christ come to earth for us – he has gone to heaven for us! He lives to intercede for us
  - Christ our advocate: not attempting to hide our sin, or to persuade the judge that it isn't as bad as it looks – able to admit the very worst about us and yet point to his sacrifice.
- We need this – and we need to know it
  - Peter thought he was strong enough – would never fail
  - Shock - didn't realise how weak he was: denied the Lord –
  - but Jesus knew about it before it happened, knew his weakness – and prayed for him.

To come to this altar and put blood on it meant walking in the light of the lampstand – no other way:

- can't come to God without walking in the light and allowing the light to expose us: God is light - if we are going to enjoy fellowship with God, need to walk in the light:
- NB – this is not about how well we walk; how holy we are – but about WHERE we walk – it is about coming to him and allowing him to expose our sin
- We all look the same in the dark – and that's why we sin so often because we stay in the dark
- Peter came to the light – but rejected what it exposed: only discovered it in bitter experience of personal failure

### 4. Back to the altar – where we started.

Priest took the blood and poured all of it out at the altar

- Back where he had started – practical sense in all of this: constantly need to come back again and again to where salvation begins for us: at the cross of Christ
- Important – whatever progress I have made, however much I have served: need to come back here – mustn't get big ideas about myself – I am still weak, sinful: totally dependent on Christ
- At the same time – however much of a failure: there is still somewhere to come – to be encouraged as well as humbled: to be reminded of the cost of my redemption – to teach me to hate sin, to renew my loyalty and love and obedience
- No matter how old we are – except that the older we are, the more we appreciate it.

### 5. Outside the gate

Not finished with our journey yet – have to take the body of the animal outside the gate and burn it to ash

- Nothing left to burn – all done, all finished. Christ brought to the dust of death: did everything – it is finished.

Hebrews 13 picks up on the reference to this happening outside the gate, outside the camp.

- It is factually what happened to Christ – he was not sacrificed in the Temple – but taken outside where he died rejected, abandoned, alone.
- The religion in which he grew up – God given at its heart: officially turned against God and his Messiah.
- Wasn't long before the implications of this were going to be very practical for the early Christians: they found that soon the same attitude was taken towards them – didn't mind their good works, but wouldn't have them teaching and serving in the name of Jesus, the one the religious authorities had officially rejected
- Christians had to make a choice:

- Couldn't have the continual offerings in the temple and the sacrifice of Christ outside the gate.
- Couldn't stand with the religious system that murdered the Lord Jesus and at the same time claim the sacrifice of Christ. We have to go outside the gate, bearing the same reproach that he carried.
- There is a reproach – the message of the cross is foolishness to some and an offence to others.
- The Christian church is increasingly mixed up here: confusing the Gospel – often there will be a reproach from the 'establishment'
- If we depend on Jesus and his sacrifice, we must stand with him and stand clear of anything that would compromise the basics of the gospel and of the one sacrifice of Christ for sin forever.