

Sacrifice and Satisfaction | The Gospel in Leviticus

How Much More (Mission)

Hebrews 9.1-14

10.4.16

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ² For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³ Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴ having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹ which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰ since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

We've been looking at the Book of Leviticus... Leviticus is the public worship manual of the Hebrew Bible. We looked at themes in this instruction book – the theme of Holiness (that God is different from us) and Sin (the dark contrast to holiness), the theme of Repentance (how sin is to be righted/fixed and relational hygiene is necessary); last week we looked at the Central Theme of Atonement (Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement as the hinge of the Book and the hinge of all history – Jesus Christ the “Azazel” or “scapegoat”).

And today we're looking at the answer, the fulfillment and response to Leviticus in this, ancient document, a long, written sermon we call the Book of Hebrews. Leviticus was written about 1500BC and this is the long awaited ending...completion written in the first generation after Jesus Christ's resurrection.

Leviticus was reality...it happened...it was given by God as the manual or instructions for worship for the people of Abraham...and it was followed for 1500 years... but it was ALSO a symbol.

It's a manual; it's NOT a collection of stories BUT...in some way it informs "the PRE-enactment of a story". It's almost like "stage directions" - instructions from the Playwright to the actors and stage crew – it sets the stage.

Imagine if there was a theatre and everyday on a very small stage they acted out a story in a very stylized form of acting – almost like interpretive dance... The actors got the stage directions but not the script...and then one day, the script was acted out...NOT in the theatre but actually on the stage of history... That's the relationship between Leviticus and the Gospel – the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. Leviticus is the stage directions – the Gospel is the Play!

And this relationship between the stage directions of a story that no one knew... and the story itself, this is explored in the Book of Hebrews.

Let's look today at: #1) Symbol and Substance #2) Sacrifice and Satisfaction

Leviticus is very strange to us... we only looked at these five themes but had we gone verse-by-verse you'd see it very vividly. The strangeness of all these regulations about food and bodily fluids and clean and unclean animals and rules about priests and sacrifices and offerings – we find it all very strange. And some of that is because we're modern but some of the strangeness is that holiness is different... and God is other than we are...holiness feels strange.

The Book of Hebrews is apparently addressing young Christians who are Jewish and don't know what the coming of Jesus Christ and THEIR believing IN Him, what does this mean for holiness and for the way they have always worshipped and related to the God who is NOT like the gods of the nations...not just a projection of ourselves but the True and Living God who is totally independent of us and who is HOLY.

Does the message of what Jesus Christ has done by His life, death and resurrection ...does that DO AWAY WITH LEVITICUS...with worship, with the holiness of God, with our Jewishness? Does the Gospel replace our Hebrew heritage and all we know in the Law?

And this writer will say in this long written sermon in every way he can illustrate and argue and convince and explain...exactly what Jesus Christ Himself said, "I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it!" (Matthew 5.17)

And the dominant device the writer uses to get the message across is comparison. The very first verse of Hebrews uses comparison – the ways God used to speak and the way God now speaks.

And all the contrasts and comparisons are marshaled and gathered to promote one great truth i.e. to show that Leviticus and all the Laws of the Torah were shadows and symbols...a kind of PRE-enactment of an event that has now taken place. They were the symbol...but now we have the substance. The symbol was wonderful but the substance is infinitely better.

A page from a magazine with a picture of a Häagen-Dazs ice cream cone may be delightful to look at ... but it's nothing compared to actually having, holding and eating the Real Thing. If you like the picture, "how much more" will you like the ice cream itself?

Leviticus is the print-ad, the glossy photo, the symbol... but the Gospel is the thing to which the symbol points... The symbol was magnificent but the substance, the fulfillment, is better.

All the symbols we've lived with in our study last year of Exodus and this year in Leviticus...they were the way God gave His people to know Him and to relate to His holiness and relate fairly to one another. They were like notes on a script, marginal notes put there by the Playwright... played out without a real clear story-line...played out on a very small stage called The Tabernacle...a model of Eden.

There were two chambers, an outer room and the interior room... there was the Table of Bread, the Tree of Light...the Altar of Incense...and on the inside the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God's Presence symbolically dwelled (shah-ken)... And there IS for that people... an introduction to holiness and a way to be cleansed and returned to ritual inclusion when holiness is disregarded.

It was effective in restoring worshipers to the community...to reinstate those who became excluded...In that way it was more than just a symbol but still...it was all very limited. It could make a worshiper ritually pure (externally).

And that's why this writer uses all these comparisons one after the other: outer chamber vs. inner chamber;

Holy place vs. Holy of holies; daily sacrifices vs. THE Day (Yom Kippur) – when the High Priest went inside; present time vs. time of reformation; blood of goats vs. blood of Christ.

Probably eight major contrasts in this little section but each one is meant to help these young Jewish believers in Jesus Christ to READ THE SCRIPT, to stay the course, to SEE THE SUPERIORITY OF SUBSTANCE OVER SYMBOL.

Somehow, what God put in their midst was not only a model of Eden but also a model of another realm. There is a Tabernacle IN THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD HIMSELF.

This is the real event that Leviticus pictured. And at a moment in human history the Director's Notes, the notes took shape (the stage is set!)...the event that was only dimly shadowed and barely recognizable in Leviticus...that event played out on the Stage of human history. (11-12)

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

The writer makes it clear...the Levitical code was really from God and it did really work to restore the excluded...but all that was only external. And it couldn't really erase guilt...it was only a symbol but now...the Real Thing... Jesus Christ completes Leviticus and fulfills what it only symbolized.

And seeing this...understanding and believing it... when it becomes a person's footing and basis and rationale for living, out of this Sacrifice and Satisfaction there's tremendous assurance and hope and motivation and purpose that comes out of this contrast. There's life in this.

"For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

See, in Leviticus and Numbers we read of unclean people being re-included after becoming ritually defiled. A worshiper touches a dead body and is excluded/barred but God sanctioned a ceremony to reattach that person to the worshipping community.

And it worked...that person was indeed welcomed to rejoin the group and resume worship and IF THAT WORKED ... "how much more, the blood of Christ who offered Himself..."

This is the completion of Israel's mission... this is not simply a healthy animal – this is the Ideal Seed of Abraham, the One Perfectly Obedient Israelite (loving and righteous without blemish) who carries all the Children of Abraham...who offers Himself and His life perfectly lived right into the actual presence of His Father in heaven...and says, "Father, forgive them... forgive them ALL their sins, take away ALL their guilt... apply MY OBEDIENCE TO THEIR RECORD ...see THEM as you see ME...holy, righteous and undefiled."

And if you see this "how much more" substance as FOR YOU... "YES! Jesus Christ, the Obedient Man, loving and righteous without defect...came into the world for me...lived, died and carried His sacrifice into THE TRUE Tabernacle for me...was accepted by the Father for ME...was raised and seen by all those witnesses for ME..." – IF YOU GET THAT ALL YOUR GUILT (past, present,

future) IS GONE, your conscience is clear...THEN, you can begin to serve God in freedom...with no strings attached.

“How much more will the blood of Christ cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” You are not serving because you're afraid of punishment...or to qualify for reward...or to avoid getting caught...ALL THOSE ARE WAYS OF SERVING THAT ARE FOR YOU and they are really NOT motivated by love!

In other words, if you are trying to save yourself by being obedient...you can never love God...your works are for yourself. An old Scottish writer, John Brown of Haddington wrote, “The man whose conscience is polluted with unpardoned guilt cannot love.”

It's only a liberated conscience that can ever love God... only a person who sees, “My past, present and future sins are atoned...and now I can truly present the sacrifice of my lips to praise God (Heb 13.15) ...the sacrifice of my body and my sexuality (1 Cor 6.19) to the God who ransomed and paid my penalty (who owns me)...the aroma of a life lived in love (Eph 5.2)... to sacrifice my comforts for the spiritual good of others (Phil 2.17)...my money (Phil 4.17).

It's NOT that the Christian is NOT called to life free of sacrifice...but because of Jesus Christ's BETTER and FINAL sacrifice we are freed to sacrifice without weird strings attached... we are being shown how to serve God in what Hebrews calls a New and Living way... my sacrifices don't save me – ONLY HIS sacrifice can do that...and only believing that and being assured of pardon can liberate me for a life of “no-strings-attached” love to God and people.

A new and living way...I'm forgiven and I'm learning to love.

Blessed are the souls that trust him,
And in him alone rejoice:
His commandments
Then become their happy choice
(Joseph Swain, 1791)

The Communion

10.4.16

We ask you to read the little intro to this part of the worship service (p. 11) and we do that as part of our understanding of St. Paul's warning about taking the bread and wine in a wrong way... some churches teach that if you have known sin in your life you shouldn't take communion (but I THINK that would disqualify everyone! ...and that is NOT what Paul is teaching there) as far as we can tell WRONG WAY is to stay aloof from the church... i.e. not to join a church because you don't see that as a necessary act of love... SOOOOOO, if you're not a member of THIS CHURCH OR some other church...please don't take the Bread and Wine... I'm very happy to have a conversation...

We all slip into patterns of doing wrong things and often of doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

And one really great truth in today's text is that while we will never be totally free from that in this life... we can find a counter-weight in the Gospel.

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There's a motivation in being forgiven of all my sins even sins I have yet to commit. And while some may see it as dangerous to tell people, "No...even your future sins are forgiven..." WE THINK IT'S EVEN MORE DANGEROUS to say, "well, only the sins you're really sorry for are forgiven...or only the sins you stop committing...or only the sins you turn away from with the right amount of disgust/shame..."

If Jesus Christ really did represent me...and lived the death I failed to live...died the death I deserved to die... IF I WAS IN CHRIST WHEN He lived, died, rose and ascended (Eph 2.4-10) – then all my sins are washed away...as far as East from West...past, present, future...and that OPENS UP FOR ME A NEW MOTIVE TO OBEY... a conscience cleansed from dead works to serve the living God...not for what I can get out of it...but because I belong to Abba...and it's my destiny to be beautiful like Jesus Christ, my older brother.

Sin sucks the life out of life...and the Living God, our Father...wants better for us. Let's eat that in now. Let's be nourished on Jesus Christ and live. (Pray)