



Gospel / Life

Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

Meditation: Prayer from Psalm 32

vv. 1-2: transgressions forgiven, sins covered, the Lord not counting anything against us, no deceit in our spirit—ask God that you may know afresh, or thank Him that you do know freshly, His grace and mercy to you.

vv. 3-5: is there anything that you should acknowledge before Him, anything that displeases Him and which is eating away at you? Speak with Him about it now.

vv. 6-7: God may be found NOW! Seek Him. If there are troubles that beset you, do not see them as His rejection but as the opportunity to call on Him and to know His protection and deliverance.

vv. 8-10: the Lord's grace comes to us and changes us: ask the Lord to make you bendable to His will, obedient to His commands, teachable to His wisdom

v. 11: All of God our Father's gracious dealings with us fill us with joy. Find some way of expressing that joy to Him now.

Study 11: The Sin Offering

Along with the guilt offerings, it is the sin offerings that “make atonement” in Leviticus.¹ Leviticus 4:1-5:13 sets out the worshipper's responsibilities in offering a sin offering, and 6:24-30 spells out the priests' responsibilities in this offering.

Unintentional Sinning

The first things to note about the sin offerings are that they offered “when anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands” (Lev. 4:1). The unintentionality of the sinning is stressed again in Lev. 4:13, 22, and 27. Then in chapter 5:1-6 spells out some instances of what this kind of sinning involves. 5:1 speaks of a person sinning by not giving testimony about a matter when he has knowledge of it, and knows that there is need for testimony. This is in the “unintentional sin” category, perhaps because it may be that the person thinks that there won't be any need for him to speak up (“Surely plenty of people could say what I've got to say.”) 5:2-3 is the sin of a person who, even unknowingly, has come in contact with something “unclean”, that is something that would mean he cannot come to the tabernacle or in contact with holy things until he has been cleansed. Even though he does not know it, he has transgressed the holiness of the tabernacle. He has objective guilt, even when it is not known subjectively. 5:4 is the sin of a person who

¹ In Leviticus 1:4 the phrase “make atonement” is used in connection with the burnt offering. Apart from this one occasion, in every place in Leviticus where atonement is made a sin or guilt offering is made (albeit at times in conjunction with other offerings.)

has made a foolish promise to do something, and then is unable to fulfil it, or maybe doesn't even know that the promise has to be fulfilled. An example: someone buys a Lotto ticket and says, "If I win, I'll give half of what I earn to World Vision." He loses the ticket, and is unaware that in fact the ticket was a winner! He is guilty for not giving the money to World Vision. Or, he wins \$1.10 and thinks that the 55 cents is not worth worrying about. He is guilty for not fulfilling his promise.

These rules and the particular instances or examples that are mentioned tell us something about our lives before God. Firstly, He is not an "easy-going" God. Things to do with honesty, integrity, and His holiness matter, and matter very deeply. In our culture an act is really only bad if the do-er does it with bad intent. Not so here. Flippancy, casualness and thoughtlessness are not excuses or excusable in the law of God.

Secondly, we may well be unaware of sinning at the time, but become aware of it later on. It is possible that we are unaware that a certain approach or a certain action displeases the Lord, but later, as we grow in Christ, we become sensitised to this fact. This can be distressing when it happens—who would want to offend the Lord?—but the blessing is that we learn to walk in a way that pleases Him more. A good thing to note is that this is true for every one of us. For this reason, we should be patient with those who insensitive to ways in which they are offending the Lord. He has His ways of bringing them to sensitivity. It might be that sometimes the thing we rush in to correct not really be as offensive to the Lord as it is to us!

The sacrifices actually made no provision for deliberate sin, or what is called in places "sin with a high hand". When such sins are committed, there is no given method of receiving forgiveness and the sinner is cast upon God Himself. In Acts 13:38-39, Paul was able to announce a great thing that had happened through the cross of Christ:

"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses."

Graded Sacrifices

The animals offered in the sin offerings varied in relation to the status of the person bring the sacrifice. The anointed priest (4:3) or the leaders representing Israel as a whole (4:13) had to offer a young bull; the individual leader a male goat (4:23); and the member of the community a female goat (4:28), or a ewe-lamb (4:32), or two young pigeons (5:7) or some grain—one-tenth of an ephah (enough good quality flour to make daily bread for one person) (5:11) if he were unable to afford the more expensive offerings. This provision for the poor is a regular feature of the LORD's provision for Israel—nobody was to be excluded from His gracious provision in the sacrifices.

The grading of the animals is according to value, or costliness. Cattle were the most expensive, then flock animals, then birds, and then grain. Male animals were more expensive than female. This was not a sexist grading!; it is simply that farmers keep fewer bulls and rams than cows and sheep. The best animals would be kept for breeding. There is an ascending costliness in the offering from that for a general member of the community through leaders to priests and the whole community, and this reminds us of the high level of accountability that is consistently referred to throughout Scripture with regard to those who have leadership in the people of God (Jas. 3:1).

Whatever the animal or gift being brought, it was essential that it was of the highest quality. There could be no defect (4:3, 14, 23, 28, 32; 5:11). The best of the best was the one to be chosen for the sacrifice. Why this had to be so, we will see in a moment.

Making The Sacrifice

The offerer brought his animal into the tabernacle, right up to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting where only the priests were allowed to enter. Near there was the altar for sacrifice. The animal was presented “before the Lord” and the offerer laid his hand on the head of the animal. By these acts the offerer was in effect identifying himself with the animal, and confessing that what was about to happen to the animal should in effect be happening to him. He then would take a knife and slit the animal’s throat.

With this, the offerer’s work in the sacrifice was done. In effect, the one thing he had to do was symbolically die in the death of the animal. The offerer was confessing that his sin qualified him only for death. But even his own death would not deal with his offence. The substitute of a faultless sacrificial animal was provided to be the way in which his offence could be atoned for.

The priests would catch the blood of the animal in bowls, and take the blood and sprinkle it in various ways and places. Then, all the fatty parts of the animals were to be burned up on the altar of sacrifice. The fat was considered the best part of the animal, and so it was appropriate that this was dedicated to the Lord, and not taken for human use. The rest of the animal was then to be either taken outside the campsite of Israel and burned up, if it was offered for the high priest or the whole community, or else it became a food gift for the priests, if it was offered for a leader or a general member of the community.

The ministry of the priests was essential. Without it, the blood could not be presented acceptably to the Lord, and without that, the offerer could not be sure of the acceptance of the substitute on his behalf. The priest *realised* for the offerer what his sacrifice was accomplishing. By the application of the blood to the altars, forgiveness and acceptance by God was proclaimed.

Making Atonement

In Leviticus 17, any person living in Israel (Jew or Gentile) is refused permission to consume blood, and anyone who does so faces the LORD’s severe wrath against him or her (17:10). The reason for this is given in the next verse:

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life (17:11).

There is a close relationship between blood and life. There not magical powers attached to blood, but where there is no blood, there is no life in the flesh of any creature. Shedding blood is to take a life, to end a life. Leon Morris points out that the Old Testament writers use the term ‘blood’ 203 times out of its 362 occurrences to denote violent death.² In the sin offering, the blood of the animal—its life—makes atonement for the offerer’s life. It is a sacrifice of life in exchange. The word for atonement is related to the word translated as ransom in other places.

In Exodus 22:28-32, there is a law given for the case of a goring bull. If a bull gores a man or woman to death, then the bull must be killed; its life is irredeemably forfeit. However, the case is more complicated if the owner has known of the propensity of the animal to gore, and has not taken proper precautions to prevent this happening. In

² Leon Morris, *The Atonement*, IVP, Leicester, 1983, p. 55

that case, the owner is guilty in the death of the person, and must be put to death with the animal. However, the offended party, the closest relative of the deceased can offer the possibility of ransom to the condemned owner. He can demand a payment—however much is his choice—and if the owner pays, then his life is redeemed.

This is precisely what is going on in the sin offering. The offender deserves to die, but the LORD in his graciousness provides a ransom, an offering of atonement that substitutes for him. In bringing his sacrifice, laying his hand on its head, and slaughtering the animal, the offerer was confessing the holiness of God, confessing his own sin, and confessing the grace of God in providing the sacrifice for him. Through the sacrifice he was acknowledging the *prior* gift and promise of God that by this action atonement would be made with him. He was not earning grace; he was living in the given grace. Note too that there is no focus in the sacrifice on the *suffering* of the animal; in fact, the killing is as humane as possible. The power in atonement is not in equivalence of suffering, but in the confessing and honouring of the holiness of the LORD.

We are undoubtedly familiar with connecting the death of Jesus for atonement with the death of the sacrificial animal. There are similarities and contrasts. Jesus died as a substitute and representative for us. However, it was not that we came obediently presenting him to the Father as our sacrifice. Rather, we laid hands on him, not in identification but in rejection, and sought to cast him away. In his incarnation and death, however, Jesus Christ was laying his hands on us and identifying with us, to the point of bearing our sins in his body.

Jesus was not only the sacrificial substitute, but also the priest completing the sacrifice. He bore the sins of the whole community of Adam, the whole race, and took the blood into the most holy place. The ultimate sin offering was the Day of Atonement sacrifice, when the blood was taken in and sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus Christ, even more, took the blood and presented it before God his Father. When he rose again and appeared to us, he was the declaration of forgiveness of our sins and the acceptance of the sacrifice. By his resurrection he shows that the Father has accepted us.

In his death, Jesus was the best of humanity being “burned up”, like the fat portions of the sacrifice. And in his death, Jesus was crucified outside the city, again appropriate for the one who was atoning for the whole community.

Christian Worship and The Sin Offering

What is the pattern for our spirituality that we learn from the sin offering? Next week we will look at this more fully. Here is a brief overview of where that will take us:

1. The Christian is one who will make confession of sin. This will be ongoing, especially as the Holy Spirit sensitises us more and more to the holiness of God.
2. The Christian is one who will receive by faith all that the Lord has done on his or her behalf in Jesus Christ.
3. The Christian believes and continues to believe the gospel promise of the forgiveness of sins.
4. As a member of the royal priesthood of all believers, the Christian will intercede for others who do not yet believe in Christ.