

Sin, uncleanness, holiness, atonement - the cross

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Well, good morning everybody and welcome to this pre-recorded service for the 29th of November! 2020 for Calvary Church here in Brighton. And at the moment we're just on the edge of lockdown two. So this is a meeting by YouTube and Zoom. We are planning to have some limited meetings and we'll try the first of these on December the 13th in the evening. I don't want to raise expectations too high. There will be many limitations but we're going to start as God helps us to be meeting together with a live stream option for those who can't come. So just let me say the usual introduction. Whether you are regular or dropping in, you're most welcome.

If you're dropping in, let me say that we're a church of about 70 to 80 people meeting normally on a Sunday morning in the UK in the seaside town of Brighton on the coast directly south of London. My name's Philip Wells. I'm an elder at the church here and I'm leading this morning. The thing that we're going to be looking at, we're going to continue looking into Hebrews. We've sort of sidestepped to go into Leviticus to go back to where Hebrews gets its thoughts from and its basic ideas from. And we're going to continue to do that this morning. Looking at the way Christ's death on the cross deals with sin and fulfils the things so vividly depicted in the Old Testament. So the plan there is on the screen, just above my head, and let's pray as we go forward. Lord, you have said that if we draw near to you, you will draw near to us. Please do so.

You have said that you are to your people a shepherd, a friend, a redeemer, a rock. Please may we find, as we draw near to you, that you are all those things and much more.

[2:10] Please be with us in this time, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, as you can see from the screen, we're going to start with the reading of a psalm.

And this is a psalm of David. It's Psalm 51. So I'll give you a moment to find that because I'm going to read the whole thing. It'd be great if you could follow along. And when we've read it, we're going to sing a version of that psalm, Have mercy, Lord, as you promise, which is back from Youth Praise originally, if any of you are old enough to remember Youth Praise.

Well, let's read Psalm 51. For the director of music, a psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. According to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

[3:20] Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you judge and when you speak and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts. Teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness.

Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

[4:30] Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from blood guilt, O God.

The God who saves me and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not deny it in sacrifice or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper. Build up the walls of Jerusalem.

Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you. Then bulls will be offered on your altar. So there is David speaking from the depths of his heart of the plea for God to deal with his sin, in particular to wash it, to cleanse him, and the joy of having sins cleansed and sins forgiven.

[5:51] He says a lot about that. Well, we're going to sing a version of that. It's Psalm 51. Have mercy, Lord, as you promise. Have mercy, Lord, as you promise.

Wash me and cleanse me from my guilt, For I can see the wrong in my life.

Against you, Lord, have I sinned. In judgment your word is blameless, For I have sinned since my beginning.

And, Lord, you look for truth in my life. So give me wisdom today.

Lord, wash me from my uncleanness. Fill me with joy where once was sadness.

[7:23] Give me a heart renewed, O my Lord, A new right spirit within.

Turn me from my sins and destroy them, But let me never be forsaken.

Lord, you give me joy in knowing you to save. And make me love your command.

I'll tell all those who ignore you, And sinners then will come repentant.

Lord, take me from the death I deserve. Then I will tell what you've done.

[8:24] Lord, take my lips and I'll praise you. O sacrifice my brain, redeems me.

All you require is my broken heart. A gift you will not refuse.

Lord, give your peace to your servant. Protect and stay by me forever.

Through your great love, Accept what I bring. And fill my life with your praise.

Lord, take my lips and destroy them.

[9:41] We want to turn from sin to you. We confess to you that we don't hate sin as we should. Sometimes we love sin and we cling to it.

And we ask you, like the psalmist did, To turn us from our sins. We sometimes are very disgusted by our sin And are conscious that it needs cleansing.

And we thank you that as we come to you, You are able to cleanse us from sin. You are able to wash us whiter than snow.

And we thank you for the preciousness Of sins being taken away, Being washed and being made clean As David longed for and prayed for.

And may that be our experience. May we not fail in that. May we not be superficial. May we not be hypocritical. But may we truly, May we be truly Christian people in that regard.

[10:50] So we come confessing our sin and seeking forgiveness from you. We come asking that we might praise you As we know the joy of sins forgiven.

As we know the wonder of what it is to have such a gracious God as our God. As we see you in your majesty holding all things in your hands and welcoming us into your presence.

Help us to be people of joy and praise and thanksgiving. We come to thank you for every mercy you've shown to us. Lord, we're sometimes very conscious of the restrictions, Particularly at this time of the virus.

And yet we have so much to thank you for. For the measure of health that you've given us. The measure of strength you've given us. The measure of comfort you've given us. And in particular to know that we are your people.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. And who like me his praise should sing. Help us to lift up our eyes to see your grandeur and your greatness. Your sovereignty.

[11:59] Your glory. Your majesty. And help us as we come this morning. We come to pray. Come to pray for the advancement of your kingdom.

Pray that your kingdom might be advanced within us. In our hearts. In our lives. In our way we live. In the way we speak. In the way we think about things.

In the things that we long for. And work for. In the things that we turn away from. May you be glorified, Lord. May your kingdom come.

And your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. O Lord, we pray that your kingdom will advance in our church here. But across the world.

And across the nation. May men and women and boys and girls turn to you. May you be honoured and uplifted. And even in our little corner of your kingdom.

[12:56] here in Brighton and Hove. We think of our brothers and sisters at New Life Moolescombe, at Park Hill Evangelical Church, and at Ebenezer Reformed Baptist Church, and the embryonic church plant starting in a year or so's time.

Please, Lord, in all these things, may you be greatly honoured. May you be pleased to advance your kingdom through your servants, such as we are, and bring glory to your holy name.

So we bring our prayers to you, and pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. And let's say together the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

[14:08] Amen. Well, we're going to sing again now. We're going to sing this song, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer, because the Lord is to us a rock and a redeemer.

And this song says, one of the lines says, you broke my bonds of sin and shame. And that's what redemption does. The redeemer breaks the bonds of sin and shame.

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer, Greatest treasure of my longing soul.

My God, like you there is no other. True delight is found in you alone.

Your grace, a well too deep to fathom. Your love exceeds the heavens reach.

[15:35] Your truth, I've found to perfect wisdom. My highest good and my unending need.

My highest good and my unending need. The redeemer of sin and shame. The redeemer of sin and shame.

The redeemer of sin and shame. Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer, Strong defender of my very heart.

My soul defied the cruel deceiver And my shield against his hailed dust My soul, my enemies surround me My hope when tights of sorrow rise My joy when trials are abounding Your faithfulness I recognize in the night O Lord, my rock and my redeemer,

Gracious saviour of my ruined life My guilt and cross laid on your shoulders In my place you suffered, bled and died You rose, the grave and death are conquered You broke my bonds of sin and shame You rose, the grave and death are conquered You broke my bonds of sin and shame You broke my bonds of sin and shame Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer May all my days bring glory to your name

[18:27] May all my days bring glory to your name May all my days bring glory to your name Now we're going to have our semis reading again And this is Hebrews 9 verses 1 to 14 And this is the bit, just remind us That it says The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer Sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean Sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean How much more then will the blood of Christ Who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God Cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death So that we may serve the living God Sins forgiven and conscience cleansed

Thank you for reading our sermon Now, the first covenant had regulations for worship And also an earthly sanctuary A tabernacle was set up in its first room Where the lampstand, the table and the

consecrated bread This was called the holy place Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place Which had the golden altar of incense And the golden covered ark of the covenant This ark contained the gold jar of manna Aaron's staff that had buddied And the stone tablets of the covenant Above the ark were the cherubim of glory Overshadowing the atonement cover But we cannot discuss these things in detail now When everything had been arranged like this The priest entered regularly into the outer room To carry on their ministry But only the high priest entered the inner room

And that only once a year And never without blood Which he offered for himself And for the sins the people had committed in ignorance The Holy Spirit was showing by this That the way into their most holy place Had not yet been disclosed As long as the first tabernacle was still standing This is an illustration of the present time Indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered Were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper They are only a matter of food and drink And various ceremonial washings External regulations applying until the time of the new order When Christ came as high priest Of the good things that are already here He went through the greater and most perfect tabernacle That is not man-made That is to say It's not a 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 Having obtained external redemption The blood of goats and bulls And the ashes of heifer Sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean Sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean How much more then With the blood of Christ Who through the eternal spirit Offered himself unblemished to God Cleanse our consciousness From acts that lead to death So that we may serve the living God This is the word of the Lord And having heard God's word Let's sing again Looking this time not backwards At the Old Testament sacrifices But back to the cross On which Christ died It's 415 5

Come and see Come and see The king of love See the purple robe And crown of thorn He wears Come and weep Come and mourn For your sin That pierced him there So much deeper Than the wounds of thorn and nail All our pride All our greed All our fallenness And shame And the Lord has laid the punishment On him It's number 415 And after this We will switch over To having our talk To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending To ending our ending Come and see, come and see, come and see the King of love.

[23:57] See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears. So does Mark rule his sin as he lifts the cruel cross.

Gone and friendless now, he climbs towards the hill. We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet.

And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream. For as he was made sin, oh help me take it in. Take wounds of love cry and Father forgive. I worship, I worship the Lamb who was saved.

Come and see, come and mourn. For your sin that pierced him there.

[25:38] So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and hail. All our pride, all our greed, all our fallenness and shame.

And the Lord has laid the punishment on him. We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet.

And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream. For as he was made sin, oh help me take it in. Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet. Deep wounds of love cry out, Father forgive. Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet. Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet. Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet. Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet.

Deep wounds of love cry and mercy meet. Deep wounds of love cry and generosity meet. Deep wounds of love cry and generosity of sin. Deep wounds of sin of sin. Deep wounds of sin of sin. I worship the Lamb who was slain.

[27:08] And of heaven, born to earth, to restore us to your hand, here we bow in awe beneath your searching eyes.

From your tears comes a joy, by your death our life shall spring, by your resurrection power we shall rise.

We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet, and a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream.

For as He was made soon, O help me take it in.

Deep ears of love cry out, Father, forgive. I worship, I worship the Lamb who was slain.

[28:49] Deep ears of love cry out, Father, forgive. Well, before we come to look at God's Word, let's pray together.

Lord in heaven, we come to your Word. You have told us so much about your Word that it builds us up, reveals our sin, shows us the Saviour.

You deal with us by your Word. And we pray that you would make good on that promise and on all those statements. Even as we think about your Word just now, will you surprise us with the relevance and power of the things that you say in the Bible to us today.

For your name's sake. Amen. Well, we're going to continue looking into Hebrews via Leviticus, and I'm going to start where I started last time, with this idea of stain.

Our moral and spiritual failures do something to us that can rightly be described as staining, or to be sullied, to stain and put dirt, as it were, on our lives, making us feel dirty.

[30:09] And there's a picture of a stain remover, a literal stain remover. And again, I say that this is actually so close to human experience that if you're honestly going to say, I don't feel any of those things, then the rest of these few minutes will be pointless for you.

Fast forward to the closing prayer, please. What the Christian message offers is what you might call a spiritual stain remover.

And that is such an important dimension to the work of Jesus that it's very well worth stopping and looking at it again. And let's remind ourselves of the centrality of this in God's agenda.

So I'm just finding Hebrews chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, where it says, In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days, these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

[31:30] The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

And you notice that in that significant outset of the letter, the work of Jesus Christ is described as a stain-removing work.

He had provided purification for sins. Now we're used to thinking of Jesus' death as a legal act in the realm of a courtroom, where there are people who are guilty and not guilty, and Jesus pays the penalty for our sins, for our crimes, in a judicial category.

We're thinking of it like a courtroom. But that is certainly not the only way of appreciating his mighty work. And in Hebrews, as we've just read, Jesus' death is seen, is to be seen as the cleansing for the uncleanness of sin.

So that's what we're going to think about. I have to say it's a much less familiar way of thinking about Jesus Christ and his death. But I hope, I hope that the Lord will help us to get some sort of grasp on this and it to get some sort of grasp on us.

[33:06] And the way I'm going to do it, as best I can, is to skim some lessons off the surface of Leviticus. Now the world of Leviticus, we dipped into it last week, is very different to our own.

It's a world of priests and camps and animal slaughter and on the way to the Promised Land. It's a strange world. And we might come to it and say, well, why are some things clean and other things unclean?

Why is it unclean to have childbirth? That's supposed to be good, isn't it? Why are some animals unclean? Well, questions. And then the sacrificial system.

Well, what's the significance of all that? All this blood and oil and washing and putting blood in different places. And there's a question again. What does it all mean? And perhaps a more pertinent question to those people.

Can you live under that system? What does it do to you if day after day you're thinking, this is clean, that's unclean. Oh dear, I've been involved inadvertently in some uncleanness.

[34:14] Now, the rest of the day I've got to spend at home or whatever. It's a bit like being under our virus restrictions, isn't it? It does

something to you. And as Christians, we look at this and we say, what does it have to do with us?

What can we learn from it? What are we meant to learn from it? And perhaps the even more significant question, what does it have to do with Jesus? And at the outset, I will say, all the things we look at in Leviticus point to Jesus.

And Jesus is the real thing. And the things in Leviticus are symbols, if you like, shadows cast by the reality of Jesus.

And they're meant to point forward to him as the real thing. So I'm going to skim some lessons off the surface of Leviticus. This is a very broad brush. And I have to say, I feel quite inexperienced at this. This is not familiar territory. So here are the lessons. Number one, sin is more difficult to fix than you think. From chapters one to seven.

[35:20] Two, you need a qualified agent to step in to deal with sin. Chapters eight to ten. Third point, about sin.

It's many things. It's ugly, disgusting, repellent, contagious, polluting, parasitic and natural. From chapters 11 to 15 and chapter 18.

And fourth point, final point for this time. There is a day to deal with sin. There is a day. You could write a song with that title, couldn't you?

And point five. This is incomplete. We haven't even got all the way through Leviticus. But I hope this will make sense to us this morning and help us spiritually. And I just say there's so much more to be said.

I'll say as best as I can. So number one, sin is more difficult to fix than you think. I'll give you a minute to find Leviticus. And to find the, at the beginning, the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

[36:26] He said, speak to the Israelites and say to them, when any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as an offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. So we're straight in and the Lord is speaking about offerings.

And my point from these first seven chapters, because these are all to do with the offerings. I'm not going to go into them in detail at all. But just say there's seven chapters of it there.

Jesus' sacrifice is the real thing, but it takes seven chapters of versions to point in any adequate sense to the real thing.

So we notice, you see, there is not just one Old Testament sacrifice, but there are many. And it takes many to begin to point adequately to Jesus.

[37:24] Now, what are these sacrifices? Well, they have different names in English, in Hebrew, the Ola, the burnt offering. That's the one that totally goes up to God.

It's a very expensive and costly offering. Then there is the, in Hebrew, Minha. It's translated as the grain offering.

But it's the offering with a word that means a gift or a tribute. And then there is the peace offering. Where's the peace offering? Or the fellowship offering.

Chapter 3, verse 1, a fellowship offering. The translation of these things is a little bit unreliable, isn't it? But the shalem is a little bit like shalom, isn't it? The peace offering.

And then the sin offering. Where's the sin offering? In chapter 6, verse 24. These are the regulations for the sin offering. Hebrew, I believe, hatat.

[38:25] From the word for sin, hata'ah. Who knows whether I'm pronouncing that correctly. But I just want us to notice that the words are very close.

So it's a sin thing. It's sort of one word derived from another. And our point is simply this, without going into any further detail.

This teaches, surely, that sin needs dealing with on a number of different fronts. It's more complicated than we think. Sin creates more problems than we think.

And resolving the matter of sin takes place on more different angles than we think. In other words, if we thought our sin was simple and easy, then we should really think again.

There's something characteristic of sin that it deceives. And we need to be wise about this. Our sin deceives us. It cloaks itself.

[39:26] It disguises itself as something else. It burrows underneath things. It gets inside. Sin is more difficult to fix than you think.

Which ought to make us all the more grateful to Jesus. Because he didn't have to die in six or seven different methods. He did it all in one go.

What Jesus accomplished in one offering is bigger. And could be encapsulated in just one offering here. He did it all.

These various different forms of sacrifice. He covered them all. And isn't he brilliant. Every single aspect of sin is fulfilled.

Every aspect of dealing with sin that these different sacrifices point to is fulfilled in just the one offering that Jesus made.

[40:28] Sort of a multi-dimensional solution that Jesus brought. Well, amen. We should worship him. Even if we don't understand what these different dimensions were, we can say, thank you, Lord.

We may not know. We cannot tell what pain he had to bear. But we believe it was for us. He hung and suffered there. Number one.

Sin is more difficult to fix than you think. Seven chapters of that. Number two. You need a qualified agent to step in. And I'm thinking now of chapters eight and onwards.

And just to say, this is serious stuff. We're a little bit at arm's length from this, aren't we? We think of priests as pictures in books. But they were real life priests.

And they had a serious job to do. Just as a trivial sort of example. We've had some plastering done in our house. And we had it done by a very professional plasterer.

[41:29] Before we got him in to do it, I had to go myself. How hard can it be? I've watched a couple of YouTube videos. They make it sound so easy. It just takes them about four minutes, 50 seconds.

They've plastered a ceiling or a wall. And you think, I could do that. Well, I'll let you into a secret. That it's not as easy as it looks. Plastering.

Writing a will. Doing something legal. I mean, how hard can that be? You can get something from Smith's, can't you? That you just fill it in. Well, you know, I wonder whether you actually need somebody who knows what they're doing.

And in Leviticus chapter 10, Nadab and Abihu, who were Aaron's sons, they thought, well, anybody can do this any old way.

They took their senses, put fire in them, added incense, and did it in a way that they thought was okay. They offered unauthorised fire before the Lord, contrary to his command.

[42:29] So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. I think if we'd been there, we would have gasped. Is it really as difficult and dangerous as that?

You get it wrong. Does it really mean death? Well, apparently it does. So you do need somebody who knows what they're doing.

And in chapter 8, there is the ordination of Aaron and his sons as the qualified agent, the priest, the person who steps in between the Lord and his people to bring them together, to make sacrifices, to work all the system.

You need somebody to step in and do this, a third party, a priest. And if you just look at chapter 8, verse 1, it says, The Lord said to Moses, again, the Lord spoke, Bring Aaron and his sons their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams, the basket containing bread made without yeast, and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and Moses did as the Lord commanded.

And without going any further, you can see there's a lot involved, isn't there? There's clothes to be sorted out, a very special uniform, sort of almost like a royal regalia.

[43:56] The anointing oil, so this is going to play a role in qualifying and preparing the priests. A bull for the hatat, the sin offering, hatat, is it?

And that's not enough. You need two rams, and you need bread. So there's a whole lot of things going on here. And if you just cast your eyes over it, you can see it's a massive task.

And this is the entry level. This is not the real thing. This is the entry level showing what's involved. How much more respect we should have for Jesus and his preparation and his qualification and his competence.

He stepped in, perfected, as Hebrews would tell us, having been through the training, having learnt everything, having been prepared, and being absolutely ready, spotlessly, purely, obediently, to sacrifice himself.

And surely we want to thank him for that and worship him. And as a little footnote, if it's as difficult as that to get somebody to step in for us, how would anybody dare to be without such a priest?

[45:27] How would anybody dare to come to God just on their own? You know, as the amateur plasterer, or as the amateur legal expert, the amateur person who comes to God to make arrangements for their own salvation.

Would anybody dare do that? Shouldn't we put that into the hands of somebody suitably qualified? And Jesus is excellently qualified. Excellently qualified.

So that was point two. You need somebody qualified to step in. Just picking these things, skimming them off the surface of the book of Leviticus. And now let's skim some things off the surface about sin.

And I'm thinking of chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, all to do with regulations for cleanness and uncleanness.

And I'm going to say sin is ugly, disgusting, repellent, dangerous, polluting, parasitic and natural.

[46:38] So I'm going to say those things and let's just do them one at a time fairly quickly. It's ugly, disgusting and repellent. Please turn to Deuteronomy chapter 23 verse 12.

Deuteronomy chapter 23 verse 12. I know I've gone outside Leviticus but it's all part of the same thing. This says, God's holy response to uncleanness is like our response to people using the street as a toilet.

Now I know some residents in the area and where they live people do use the street as a toilet. And they find it disgusting and abhorrent and unacceptable.

And we learn here that that is a sort of visual picture for us because we all get that idea. That's how God in his holiness responds to our sin.

It's a horrible, ugly, disgusting, repellent thing which makes him want to think whether he'll move away and go somewhere else, if you see what I mean.

[48:26] And now strangely and wonderfully God's sin does not, sorry, our sin does not repel God so that he leaves us.

He says he'll never leave us nor forsake us. But something amazing takes place that that should be the case. But sin is sin. And it makes me think, do you think we're rather insensitive to our own sin? Do you think we just think it's okay and God isn't that bothered about it? Well, he thinks it's like having a street full of poo. An uncleansed sin, according to this text, has this effect to make God to withdraw.

He moves about your camp to protect you and deliver you and deliver your enemies to you. And he will not do that if he sees unclean things. It will make God turn away so that he does not turn away from you.

It's inclined to make him turn away, but he doesn't. Or to break out in fire, as he did with Nadab and Abihu. So this is God's reaction to sin.

[49:43] And we learn that sin is in itself ugly, disgusting and repellent. Another thing we learn is that it's dangerous. And again, without going into detail, when animals are substituted in the place of the sinner, what happens to them?

Well, they get cut up and burnt, typically. They get cut up and burnt. They get turned into smoke. Turned into a smell that goes up to God, which he finds acceptable.

Just think about the cherubim with the fiery sword, guarding the way back to Eden as Adam and Eve were expelled.

I've just been thinking, what happens when you have a fiery sword? What does it do? I think the answer is, it cuts people up and burns them. And if you try and get back into the presence of God via the cherubim, you get cut up and burnt.

But here, an animal gets cut up and burnt for us. A substitute. And therefore, we can go in. Dangerous.

[50:57] Polluting. Pollution is something that our society does understand. In the Levitical system, there would be the word to profane, to defile, which is not that far from the idea of polluting.

So we have pollution. So air pollution, nitrous oxide, particle sizes. Somebody around here is quite an expert in polluted air.

Apparently, wood-burning stoves produce more pollution than cars do, or something like that. Don't quote me on it. We all have a horror now of a polluted sea with bits of plastic in it.

And we would be appalled at the idea of having polluted water. Something came out of our taps mixed with something that you wouldn't want to drink. Pollution.

So we're repelled by that thought. But sin is of this nature. We're to think of sin as producing uncleanness and polluting human life and society.

[52:06] Sin is dangerous and it's polluting. And sin is parasitic. I think that would be a fair way of talking about Deuteronomy chapter 14 verse 33.

I'm sorry, not Deuteronomy. Leviticus chapter 14 verse 33. Where it talks about mildew. When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your possession, and I put a spreading mildew in a house in that land, the owner of the house must go and tell the priest, I have something that looks like mildew in my house.

Mildew is a sort of fungal thing that grows on the brickwork or on something damp. You get mildew in damp corners of a cupboard or something like that.

I think that's the idea of it. It's growing. It shouldn't be there. It's feeding off something good and producing something nasty. Feeds off something wholesome and spoils it.

Sin has a parasitic character. I think this is a fair deduction from this. Do you remember somebody once said or thought that something was good for food and pleasing to the eye and desirable to make one wise?

[53:32] Those are all good things, aren't they? Good for food, that's good. Wholesome. Pleasing to the eye, what can be wrong with that? That's wholesome. Desirable to make one wise, that's wholesome.

But sin sort of feeds on that and distorts that. That was Eve, wasn't it? Taking the apple, not the apple, the fruit.

Sin is parasitic. Sin is natural. And I'm now just skimming something off chapter 18 where it says, right at the beginning, The Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and say to them, I am the Lord your God.

You must not do as they do in Egypt where you used to live and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.

And then there's the list of sexual relations that are not to be entered into. But it's prefaced by saying, don't do it like they do in Egypt.

[54:37] Don't do like they do in Canaan. These are the nations that go their own way. They do what comes naturally. And sin has this sense that it's something that people think is natural.

David Wells, the writer, no relation, said somewhere that this world makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem odd.

That's the world we live in. It's always telling us that sin is normal and that righteousness is odd. And we need the Bible to put us back the right way round.

We need Holy Scripture to teach us that it's sin that's wrong and righteousness that's right. So sin is parasitic and it's natural.

Well, some things are about sin. And the fourth thing off the surface of the text, there is a day. Yes, it would be a good title for a song, wouldn't it? I'm thinking of Leviticus 16, where there is a day, actually a day of atonement.

[55:48] That's what it's called in translation. Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. To atone in English meaning at one, to make two different parties at one together.

In Hebrew, it's usually thought that Kippur is to do with covering. A day of covering.

A day of covering for sin. And this word always used to make me a little bit uneasy. To cover over. It can be used to mean you don't actually deal with it properly, you just cover over it.

So there's an expression to paper over the cracks, meaning that if you've got a wall with cracks in it, you can put wallpaper over it and you don't actually deal with the cracks, you just make it so that they don't show.

And that is not what is meant by covering when God covers sin. He doesn't cover it over in some inadequate way. It's more like to cover, in the sense of cover the bill or cover the expenses.

[56:54] So you go for a meal and it costs 80 quid and somebody produces a cheque for a thousand pounds and says, well, this ought to cover it.

It's that sort of covering. God covers the problem of sin on the day of covering, the day of atonement. And here in Leviticus 16 is the day of atonement.

You can read it in detail if you like. But on this day, huge effort is made to deal with the whole matter of sin for lock, stock and barrel. And it's a complicated day.

It's a very special day. And a lot of effort is made on that day. And there is a but. But it doesn't work. It doesn't work because it has to be repeated again and again and again. Year by year by year by year by year. And that repetition is admission of failure.

[57:59] It's a bit like painting the fourth bridge. You start at one end, get all the way to the other end, then you have to go back again and paint it all over again. Because the painting was just a temporary fix.

It doesn't solve the real problem. And likewise, the day of covering, the day of atonement in this Levitical system doesn't work. It just shows what needs to be done but doesn't manage to do it.

As Christians, we can look and say, actually, there was a day. There was a day. A single day when in a matter of hours something was transacted which puts all the Levitical stuff into the shade.

Because what all the Levitical stuff tried to do but couldn't manage was achieved on that single day. And the man upon the cross, for that was what happened on that single day, the man upon the cross cried out at the end of his hours of suffering.

Finished. Done it. I've put the word all there because that's the implication, isn't it?

[59:23] It's all finished. Nothing left undone. No aspects untouched. No depths unplumbed. No complications covered over, as you would cover over, paving over the cracks.

But the whole thing dealt with. Isaiah 66 verse 8 says, Can a country be born in a day? Can a nation be brought forth in a day?

Could one single day achieve all that? Apparently yes. Zechariah 13 verse 1 says, On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

And on that day a fountain was opened, powerful and effective, to cleanse all his people from sin and uncleanness and impurity and stain.

He did it. And one, I'll just quote that song which says, Hallelujah. What a saviour. He did it all.

[60:34] Well, there we are. I tried to skim some lessons just off the surface of Leviticus. I did it with a very broad brush and I wouldn't claim that it was very much beyond beginner level actually.

But what did we cover? We covered this. Number one, sin is more difficult to fix than you think. It takes a lot. Jesus did it all. Number two, you need a qualified agent to step in.

You wouldn't dream of doing this yourself. You need a priest, a go-between, an advocate, a mediator. And Jesus is excellent at that.

And we thought, thirdly, of all the awfulness of sin. It's ugly, disgusting, repellent, dangerous, contagious, polluting, parasitic and natural. That's what beings dealt with and we ought to have our eyes open to that.

Jesus is able to deal with that. And fourthly, there is a day to deal with sin. A day, not like the day of atonement, which was constantly repeated, but one day in which Jesus fixed it all.

[61:47] Isn't Jesus impressive? Well, we've heard God's word as sin is described to us and as the cross is described to us.

And we're going to close with this song from Town and Getty. Oh, to see the dawn of the darkest day.

Christ on the road to Calvary. The power of the cross. Christ became sin for us. Took the blame. Bore the wrath.

We stand forgiven at the cross. Wonderful song describing the horrid, horrible nature of the cross. But the awesome power that there was there when Christ died. Now the daylight flees. Now the ground beneath quakes as its maker bows his head. Curtain torn in two. Dead are raised to life. Finished the victory cry.

[62:52] Let's sing Oh to see the dawn of the darkest day. Christ on the road to Calvary.

Tried by sinful men. Torn and beaten them. Nailed to a cross. Our world. This the power of the cross. Christ became sin for us. To a cross. crowning your blood stay round this the love of the cross Christ became sick for us for the blame for the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross now the daylight flees now the ground beneath quakes as its baker bows his head curtain torn in two dead are raised to life finish the lame tree cry this the power of the cross

Christ became sick for us took the blame for the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross to see my name written in the words for through your suffering I am free death is crushed to death life is mine to live one through your selfless death is mine to live this the power of the cross son of God slain for us what a love what a cost we stand forgiven at the cross oh to see my name written in the wounds oh to see my name written in the wounds for through your suffering i am free death is crushed to death life is mine to live one through your selfless love this the power of the cross son of God slain for us what a love what a cost we stand forgiven at the cross let's close in prayer may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever

[67:12] Amen Amen well it's that's it from me and until we meet again I'll say goodbye bye bye just now bye