

Christ our Purification

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[0 : 00] Well, it is very good to be here. Thank you very much for the invitation for me to come and minister here. It's good of you to put up with students for the ministry, and I thank you for your grace in that regard.

I want, as we've read this passage, I want to invite you to use the imagination that God has given you, to use your imagination.

And imagine that we, those of us who are all gathered here today, this afternoon, are in this camp of the children of Israel.

At the time that this law was being given, and that this ceremony, or series of ceremonies, would be carried out.

That is, we all of us together were slaves in Egypt under a hard taskmaster, who drove us and beat us.

[1 : 16] And we were crying out for deliverance. We were crying out for release. And amazingly, wonderfully, we were delivered from that slavery.

We were redeemed out of that slavery by God himself. In a series of mighty acts, which culminated in the night of the Passover, a dreadful night of darkness and of judgment, but yet of light and of deliverance.

We were delivered out of Egypt, we were delivered out of Egypt, out of that slavery. And we were carried even through a parted sea into safety, while the waves then gathered together again over the army of Pharaoh that was pursuing us.

And now we live in the wilderness. But we are on our way to a good land that God has promised us. He has promised to take us there himself. We live in a camp. And we live in tents. And here's the amazing thing.

[2 : 37] We live in tents all together. And so does God. God lives in a tent, dwells in a tent, in our midst, in the camp.

The creator of the universe lives next door. This is an amazing thing.

Not just a vague idea of God either. This is the God. The living God. The God who actually is. The God who has revealed his name to the human person he has appointed to lead us.

To Moses. Revealed himself in this amazing way. In a burning bush and said his name is I am who I am.

I'm the self-existing, uncreated, all-powerful God. Who reveals his name as Yahweh. The God, because of who he is.

[3 : 48] Whose commitment to his covenant is total. Total commitment to his covenant to redeem a people for himself.

He lives with us. And in some ways that is so reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

Because there God dwelt with man, with humanity as well. God's dwelling place was with man.

It is almost like that again. Because humanity was expelled from the Garden when Adam sinned.

They could no longer live together in peace.

But now in some sense God again dwells with man. In some ways it's so like the Garden. But in other ways it's nothing like that.

[4 : 54] For one reason and for one reason only. Sin is now an active issue. It is a live issue in the camp.

God is holy. We are not. God is holy. We are not. And sin is a constant issue.

Hence, this whole system of sacrifices that takes place throughout the year. To point towards the fact that an ultimate sacrifice that actually works and will be permanent and won't need to be repeated.

Has to take place at some point by someone. But on this day we realise something fundamental. There are all these sacrifices.

But the one we've read about in Leviticus chapter 16 called the Day of Atonement. Again, if you imagine, we are in this camp.

[6 : 03] This reminds us that our presence in the camp has even made God's sanctuary unclean.

We, through our uncleanness, have contaminated the tabernacle. And atonement needs to be made for it.

It needs to be cleansed. And so do we. We need to be cleansed as well. This is an act of purification.

So that the tabernacle will be fit for divine occupancy. So that that may continue. These rituals secure God's continued presence.

A holy God among a people who are constantly breaking his law. And so that is what we see.

[7 : 06] And in this amazing ritual, it is strange, isn't it? When we read about this, there are so many elements that are unfamiliar to us in our daily lives here.

But if we imagine again that we are these Israelites, how it must have been brought home to us that there is this barrier, this issue of sin between us and this God who is in one sense so near, but in another still yet so far.

However, the constant sacrifices, we would see the animals, we would see them being slain, and the smell of the burnt offerings would pervade the whole camp.

We would be constantly reminded of the need for them. And in this offering as well, in this ritual, we would see things so clearly.

It's like a visual lesson. It would be to teach us about what is going to happen, what must happen in the future.

[8 : 25] And as I've said, we can't go into, and I'm sure you're glad that I won't try to cover every aspect of this chapter, but I think we can focus on three aspects of this chapter.

If we look, first of all, at what Aaron is told, what Aaron is told at the start of the chapter by God via Moses, what Aaron is told at the start of the chapter by God via Moses, and then what Aaron is told at the start of the chapter by God via Moses.

And then what Aaron is to wear as the priest going into the most holy place, what Aaron is to wear will tell us something.

We will just look at each of these two things briefly before going to see what Aaron has to do, to see what these show us about the real sacrifice, about the original of which this is a copy, and how breathtakingly, wondrously glorious, what the original does, which this shadow, which this type, which this copy could never achieve, with the hope that we will see our Savior for the great high priest that he is, and see his work of atonement in some, at least, of its splendor, and its power and its glory.

First of all, what is Aaron told at the start of this chapter? You'll see I've got my trusty magnifying glass again to help me here.

[10 : 19] Well, first of all, we see that Aaron is addressed by God through a mediator. Aaron is not addressed directly by the Lord, but by Moses.

The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they drew near before the Lord and died. And the Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron, your brother, not to come at any time inside the veil before the mercy seat that is on the ark so that he may not die.

And what Aaron is told here gets at the issue. There is still this issue. Even though God dwells with people once again and has descended and dwells in a tent beside his people who live in tents, there is still this terrible issue of approach.

There is a barrier to approaching God in some kind of unmediated way because to come into the presence of the Holy One of Israel as a sinner in a way that he has not appointed has resulted already in the death of two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu.

They have used unauthorized fire or as the old version has it, the strange fire that they've offered has not been what God has prescribed.

[11 : 57] They have come before him in the wrong way and fire has gone out from the Lord and consumed them. We see then the seriousness of what it is to approach this living God.

But here also we see grace. We see grace because God is concerned for his people. He doesn't want them to be consumed in this way and so has made this provision a way whereby he can be

approached safely.

And then what follows is a description of how that happens. Only once he tells Aaron through Moses may he go in behind the veil.

God's presence is manifested above the ark of the covenant in which is contained the law the testimony.

And two figures of cherubim are on either side and they look towards each other and down and God tells us he appears above this.

[13 : 08] looking down as it were on the ark below and the reminder of the broken law that lies inside it.

Reminded of the sin of his people. And what we have next is you'll see there seems to be in some ways some repetition in the chapter and that's because the first section is a summary of all that is to be done and then it then goes into greater detail.

But that's what Aaron is told to do. Be careful how you approach me. I am dangerously holy. But in my grace I have made a way for you to come in and ensure my continued presence among you.

A sinful people I have made provision for my presence to remain with you. And this is how it's to be done. That's what Aaron is told and we are reminded of the awesome holiness of God.

Secondly and we may or I wouldn't imagine you would do this but I would be susceptible to skimming over this part which is actually very important and that is what Aaron is wearing.

[14 : 35] You see the description of what Aaron is told to wear in chapter 16 and verse 4.

He shall put on the holy linen coat and have the linen undergarment on his body and tie the linen sash around his waist and wear the linen turban. These are the holy garments.

garments. What's significant about this? Well normally the high priest's garments were glorious.

He was resplendent in the most wonderfully radiant splendid clothing.

a breastplate in which there were fiery precious stones. A turban indeed with a golden what was called a holy crown on his head with holy unto the Lord inscribed upon it.

[15 : 41] It has often been remarked that Aaron in his usual high priestly garments looked like a king. He looked like a king because he was demonstrating the kingship of God the God in whose tabernacle he served among his people.

He looked amazing but different dress is prescribed for this day and he doesn't look anything like a king today and this is the only day he's going behind the veil the only day in the year.

Because when you come face to face with the Lord it is inappropriate to be dressed like a king.

One commentator has remarked Aaron normally looked like a king but today he looks more like a slave. That's interesting isn't it?

Aaron on this day to go behind the veil has taken the form of a servant. He has been found in appearance as a servant as he goes before the Lord.

[17 : 02] But now we come to what Aaron is to do and what Aaron is to do is to make a cleansing for the tabernacle and the holy place itself.

And we hear in this passage how he first of all must make atonement for himself. Aaron is a sinner himself and he cannot come into the holy place without blood for his own sins.

And sprinkling that blood on what is called the mercy seat, the gold slab which sits above the ark.

Only by covering that broken law with the blood of a sacrifice will he be able to stand there and live.

Again think of your senses as Aaron you can only imagine must have been trembling as he went

that first time behind the veil with the coals and the blood and had to immediately put incense

ground incense on the coal so that a smoke cloud would appear again almost to create another veil

if you like between him and the raw shekinah glory of God and then trembling he must have been

spreading and sprinkling that blood on the seat that's what he must do first of all but then there is

the real center piece of the ceremony the two goats the two goats he's made a cleansing for himself

but he must make a cleansing for the sanctuary and for the people and when we consider what

Aaron was doing there that was all in private of course if we are just the people in the camp we

would not have seen him go in behind the veil that would be something unknown to us and so again

God in his grace has an aspect to the ceremony that all the people can see in fact that all the

people must see and that is that two goats are brought before the Lord but in the view of the public

as well and one is chosen to be slain as a sin offering to cleanse the tabernacle but the other one is

to be used as what is called a scapegoat and you'll see the name of this word azazel which people

are actually unsure as to the meaning of but certainly to all intents and purposes means going off

into the wilderness and going off to a place of forsaken ness and what will publicly happen is that [20 : 14] Aaron the high priest in front of the Lord and the people places his hands on the head of this goat and confesses all the sins remember when we were reading it there it says all the sins all their transgressions all their iniquity it is all symbolically transferred placed onto the head of this goat and then he is led away he is born away out of the camp into a far away place where he can never return to show that God has taken their sins away has taken them far away to be forgotten about that goat is the bearer of the sins of the people and he's led away into a desolate howling wilderness the people need to see this but of course they know it ultimately offers nothing effectual or nothing permanent and that's why it was worth reading the whole chapter we see again the stipulations at the end of the chapter this has to happen over and over again there are even instructions for

Aaron's sons and his sons because this is a permanent institution it has to keep on happening once a year the people are afflicted as once again they see their sins placed on the goat's head and once again a goat is led away into the wilderness but no sooner has Aaron washed himself and the person that's led the goat away and he has to cleanse himself again as well then once again the camp becomes more and more unclean contaminated defiled even to the degree where the tabernacle must be cleansed and that shows us our great need our desperate need for purification so it points us towards as we see here the shadow of Calvary casting itself backwards it shows us the need of a better sacrifice a better priest a better atonement we are told that all this was a sign of the good things to come and we see the good things to come in our

Lord Jesus Christ he didn't need to offer blood for his own sins because he didn't have any so this whole part where Aaron had to cleanse himself first of all was entirely unnecessary because he was perfect and sinless but who of the goats is he is he the scapegoat or is he the goat that is slain and his blood sprinkled over that mercy seat so that God's wrath over his broken law will not be poured out the answer is both he is both these or they point both point towards his perfect atoning work are we the assembly of Israel or this tabernacle that must be purified we are both what we must realize here in that

God's dwelling place must be fit for divine occupancy in this period in the history of the people of God God's dwelling place was the tabernacle and later on when they are established in Israel it's in the temple but God's dwelling place now is in his people the people of God the church is his temple not the building although it is a building it's a building made of people living stones do you see our need to be fit for divine habitation we need to be cleansed we need to be purified and that's again what this passage is showing us our need to be cleansed entirely and completely and that is only done through our

Lord Jesus Christ but yet there is the reality isn't there of sin ongoing sin indwelling sin in our lives thankfully we have a permanent atonement that paid for every sin so that when we turn in contrition in repentance to God there is cleansing there is forgiveness every provision has been made for us that we may come before the Holy One God himself and receive forgiveness and I urge you that if there is still sin we must remember if there is still sin something unresolved in your own life that we are the dwelling place of God and we must be fit for divine occupancy and therefore we must go to this sacrifice that these shadows point forward to and plead for forgiveness plead that blood that that glorious cleansing and purification purchased at

[27 : 08] Calvary may cleanse us afresh now I imagine most of you here today are Christians and so we can as we look at this passage think of if we remembered when we tried to put ourselves in the shoes of those Israelites in the camp just what how much a greater gift we have been given we can approach the throne of grace with boldness still with reverence and awe because God has not changed but this divide that has occurred through sin has now been broken down and the way to God has been opened to us by Jesus blood but if you are not a Christian the fact remains that this sin that needs to be transferred off of you so that you can be clean so that you can be purified remains still on your own head and I want you to come with me to

Calvary I want you to come with me to the cross where the only sacrifice that works for the cleansing of sin took place remember Aaron placing on the head of the goat the sins of all the people and we see at Calvary the cross outside the camp a place of desolation a place of abandonment outside the city of Jerusalem being the scapegoat being the one who bears in his own body the sins of the people the sins are transferred onto his own head and there he bears the wrath there justice is done won't you come to

Jesus Christ to be cleansed won't you come he says anyone who comes to me I will in no way cast out he is the solution and he's offering you the solution the cleansing of all sin friends I haven't been a Christian for very long and before that I lived a terrible life and as I read the Bible and started to see who God really is and passages like this were extremely helpful to me what became clearer and clearer and clearer was this radiant perfect holiness of God and it was beautiful but it was also terrifying because it made me aware it brought to light my own filthy uncleanness

I could see I was just all over bemired with sin inside and out and that it was my heart that had to be cleansed not just the externals as I read that Jesus said it is what comes out of a man's heart that defiles him that makes him unclean and I felt so unclean so defiled would there be any way back into the presence of this holy God and I read yes but not through anything I could do through what he had graciously already done given his own son as a sacrifice for sin that through coming to him in repentance and in faith simply saying

I am unclean cleanse me that I would be cleansed and that is what happened and of course I still sin but what Christ did that day doesn't just cleanse from sin doesn't just purify us it changes our entire relationship to sin and fundamentally breaks the power of sin helps us to hate sin to turn from sin and to confess sin and to repent of sin and by God's grace in his strength that is what I'm endeavouring to do day by day let us all remember that cleansing remember that we are a people to be fit for divine occupancy because the spirit of

[33 : 04] God dwells in us and let us know that that cleansing has been brought about and we must confess our sins and he is faithful and just to forgive and he will put us back on that right track if you are not a Christian yet do you feel the arrow the deepening sense of sin which hopefully this passage affords you do you feel the arrow Christ was pierced for our transgressions he can take that away well all I can say in response to what we've read here is thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift thank you