

Jesus Died For Me (3): Levitical Offerings

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[0 : 0 0] turn with me please to Leviticus chapter 1 Leviticus chapter 1 and we begin with the question what was happening on the cross when Jesus died what was happening on the cross when Jesus died was it an accident a cruel twist of events which led to an innocent man being murdered and executed for crimes he didn't commit was it an example the model of a Christian demonstrating how to live well and how to die well or was it as I recently heard a shock treatment that the death of Jesus was designed by God to shake us as human beings out of our violent tendencies and restore peace to us as a human race well for sure the cross of Jesus there's more to it than meets the eye but but what exactly is the it if the cross is central to Christians without which there is no Christianity at all then surely it's important that we understand what the it of the cross is what exactly was happening on the cross when Jesus of Nazareth died there now of course all of us will happily say

Jesus died for me but in what sense is that true from beginning to end the Bible comprehensively answers that question for us be it the book of Genesis at the beginning of the Bible or be it the book of Revelation at the very end of the Bible the answers here in the word of God over the summer months we're engaged in unpacking this answer from the beginning books of the Bible the first five books of the Bible books concerning events which happened thousands of years before Jesus was born before Jesus lived before he rose again yet yet yet yet books which explain that the glorious and loving plan of God in sending his son to die for us on the cross do you know in what sense Jesus died for you was it an accident the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time was it an example the right man showing us how to live and die in the right way was it shock treatment designed to bring you to your senses now you will know that the book of leviticus gets its name from the israelite tribe of which there were 12 called the levites the levites were the were the priests and the preachers and the servants of god at the temple in jerusalem and at other religious sites throughout israel so the book of leviticus contains all the rules and the processes the levites were to follow in the fulfillment of their duties in many ways i may have wished that leviticus 1 was not in the bible at all in days of animal rights and of modern sensibilities it's so raw and it's so cruel trust me when i say to you it was no less raw and no less cruel for the people of moses day as we shall see its rawness and its cruelty is very much part and parcel of the wonderful picture that paints of the cross of jesus and in what sense you can say as a christian jesus died for me this morning i want us to consider three things about this picture of of so-called substitutionary atonement in the daily sacrifices of the temple in leviticus chapter one daily sacrifices of the tabernacle rather first why jesus had to die for me second what it cost jesus to die for me and thirdly how god loved me when jesus died for me and as we go through these three things i want us to understand three deeper points first how sinful sin really is second how agonizing the death of jesus really was and third how none of us can save ourselves we all need god's sovereign intervention my ultimate aim is to shine the light of leviticus upon the cross so that as a christian you may grow in holiness love and grace first of all then why jesus had to die for me why jesus had to die for me

very subtly over the last 40 years or so the nature of the christian gospel has changed its focus whereas before it was concerned with getting our relationship with god right now it's too much concerned with being a therapeutic tool for getting ourselves right the gospel exists to give your best life now to deal with your negative thinking and negative patterns of behavior the gospel is all about what makes us happy what makes us healthy what makes us complete and whole as human beings it has become the proclamation of a christianized course of man-centered therapy but in levičius 1 we are led back to the original focus of the christian gospel its ultimate direction why were all these hundreds of thousands of animals sacrificed by the priests in the old testament we found the answer in verse 4 to make atonement to make atonement the reason for all this slaughter was to make atonement the primary focus of the christian gospel is to make atonement what does that mean well take the word atonement apart at its most basic level it means at one meant to be at one with someone to be right with someone you know when two friends disagree with each other we say of them they're not at one with each other so to make atonement therefore means to repair a broken relationship to reconcile two people who once were enemies to remove the obstacles between them which keep them apart to make atonement means to make friends of enemies to make one human being one with another human being to restore a broken relationship the original word we translate as to make atonement literally means to cover it's the same word that's used to describe how

Noah covered the hull of the ark with pitch to make it watertight and keep it from sinking it's the same word jewish people use today to talk of the skull cups jewish boys and jewish men wear the so-called kippur the cap that covers their heads k-p-r in the context of a broken relationship therefore to make atonement means to cover over that which has brought about a breach in the relationship in the first place to cover over it to remove it so that the relationship can be restored unfortunately I have a broken relationship with a very dear friend and I would do anything I can I could to restore it I would love nothing more than to remove the obstacles which are keeping us apart to cover over them that is what atonement consists of removing or covering over the obstacles which cause a break in the relationship well to go back to the original issue in this section

Leviticus chapter 1 that over the course of the last 40 years the focus of the Christian gospel has changed from being one of making oneself right with God to being a course in a Christianized self-help therapy to get you right with yourself for what purpose then did the priests and the Levites in Leviticus 1 offer all their animals as sacrifices was it so that they could learn how to have better marriages have better jobs have better self-esteem in other words in what direction is the broken relationship these priests are trying to heal is it with the self or is it with something or someone else for whose benefit is atonement being made by the sacrifice of all these bulls and all these goats and all these birds or to put it another way why all the blood guts and gore of Leviticus 1 well as you read through the rest of the chapter and as you read through the rest of the Bible you quickly realize that the modern fascination with self-help therapy is empty unhelpful and unsatisfying the primary relationship that needs to be restored is our relationship with God our vertical relationship with Him rather than our internal relationship with ourselves the bulls the goats and the birds died to make atonement to cover over and remove the obstacles between us and God to repair the break in our relationship to God caused by our sin and by our transgression two weeks ago on our journey down to England we stopped over at York Minster for coal even song on the Sunday evening and I was most disappointed to discover that in York Minster they have expunged the confession of sin from their liturgy

[11 : 53] Thomas Cranmer's confession of sin in the English Book of Common Prayer is most marvelous almighty and most merciful father we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts we have offended against thy laws we have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done and there is no health in us but thou O Lord have mercy upon us miserable offenders spare thou them O God which confess their faults restore thou them that are penitent according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord and grant O most merciful father for his sake that we may hereafter live a godly righteous and sober life to the glory of thy holy name actually

I want to be even more forceful and more provocative and more accurate what needs dealt with isn't our relationship to God what needs dealt with is God's relationship to us God loves us God will always love us but he is justifiably angry with our sin with what we have become of sinful men and women and with the actual sins we commit he is so infinitely and purely holy just and righteous that he cannot look upon us in our sin it is God who is primarily offended with us because of our sin and so ultimately it is God's relationship with us which has been broken by our sin and is therefore repaired by the sacrifice of atonement the obstacles that keep us from him and him from us our sin and guilt are covered over by the blood of the slaughtered animal that's why on three occasions in this chapter in verses 9 in verse 13 and verse 17 the impact of the sacrifice is that it is a pleasing aroma a soothing aroma to the

Lord it is God who is reconciled to us through the sacrifice of atonement not us to him it is God's anger and just wrath which is turned away from us through the sacrifices of the offerings of atonement in Leviticus 1 by virtue of our sin being covered by the blood of these animals why then did Jesus die in what sense can we talk of Jesus dying for me if it was no accident if it was no made example if it was no shock treatment then what was it the answer is here it was the ultimate sacrifice of atonement with Jesus himself offering himself as the lamb of God by whose death our sins are covered and removed and peace is restored to God's relationship with us

God's just anger no longer rests on our head but on the head of the holy sacrifice offered on the cross for us on that cross it was not a bull and a sheep that was being offered to reconcile God to us to remove the obstacles of our sin and guilt on the cross it was Jesus the son of God himself who was being offered to take away our sin that's this chapter in a nutshell and what shall our response to this be don't you realize that it was your sin that nailed Christ to the cross do I not realize that that it that it cost him his life blood that he was shedding that blood in the place of my execution if we at least realize this surely it will keep us from sin how can we indulge ourselves in that which nailed our Lord to the cross how can we enjoy that which caused

Jesus such pain how can we live with jealousy and rivalry with gossip and slander when Jesus died to make us one with God why Jesus died for me secondly what it cost Jesus to die for me what it cost Jesus to die for me I'm not alone I'm sure in finding this chapter hard reading you know in the Bible one almost wants to put an X rating on certain passages this one included in some ways I'm quite glad the children are downstairs so they can't hear this because it's so filled with blood and guts and gore with violence with slaughter make no mistake the job of the Levites was all about death and dying about blood and bleeding perhaps what I find most challenging about this chapter is something that would escape the casual reader the Greek translation of this chapter the so-called 70 or

[17 : 44] Septuagint translates the word burnt offering by one of the most terrifying words in the English language the word holocaust holocaust that word evokes sickening images of Nazi death camps of their determination to destroy everyone of Jewish heritage of emaciated bodies of gas chambers of lost generations of Jewish children and when we read Leviticus 1 we're to think in terms of a holocaust the sickening images of animals being slaughtered their dying cries extinguished their throats are cut open and body parts cut up and laid upon an altar and burned this tabernacle in the wilderness later replaced by the temple in Jerusalem was a terrifying place the stench of rotting blood the sound of dying animals the sight of slaughter and holocaust no one in their right minds would ever want to be part of it over the years many Christians and many Christian teachers have have made model tabernacles so they can teach their people about individual elements within the tabernacle and explain their

New Testament significance I thought of making one during lockdown I might still make one but if I wanted that model tabernacle to sit there on that table and be accurate so you could see it as it really was I would have to slaughter an animal and place its blood all over that model tabernacle it would stink no one would ever want to make a scale model of the Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp why then would you make a scale model of the tabernacle and then we come to the cross of Jesus a place of no less holocaust than the tabernacles and the temples in which the Levites carried out all their animal sacrifices you know the hill on which

Jesus died was covered with a little bushy plant called hyssop a fragrant smelling plant which I believe was intentionally planted on that hill to mask the awful smells of men dying on the cross the smells of their blood and their guts and their gore plain for all to see that's what happened on the cross it's not the nice sanitized picture we so often have of it in our minds it is the harsh terrifying disgustingness of blood stinking in the sun and the shrieks of dying men a place to make you sick no doubt many who visited vomited when they saw bodies being ripped apart blood flowing so freely and so when we say these words Jesus died for me

I wonder to what extent we have taken into account the horrifying disgusting and agonizing holocaust of Calvary's cross when I was a boy in my home in church in my home village in the north there was a lady Manny McDonald she was still alive and when she took communion she'd always be sitting opposite me weeping her eyes would well up when the bread and the wine were passed to her and I'd hear her quietly sob I remember on one occasion being the insensitive boy that I was asking her why do you cry so much at the Lord's table Mary to which she replied it's then I realize how much it cost Jesus to die for me it's then I realize how much it cost Jesus to die for me if we're if we're finding Leviticus one hard reading but we are able to unemotionally unimpassively read through the gospel accounts of the passion of Christ then I would argue that we do not even begin to understand how much it cost our Lord to die for us that both body and soul were suffering unimaginable torment that they were both subject to the judgment of God upon our sin so that atonement could be made think of the slaughter of the holocaust on Calvary does this mean nothing to you at all this is what your

Jesus went through for you the lamb with a human voice my God my God why have you forsaken me do you really suppose really that Jesus would have subjected himself to such a painful holocaust upon the cross unless it was absolutely necessary if there was any other way our sin could have been covered and removed would he not have taken it rather than have be subjected to the torture and slaughter of Calvary does the real meaning of the cross as God's atoning sacrifice for our sin does it not blow away all the other explanations the accident theory the example theory the shock theory nothing but the blood of Jesus can take away our sin and restore our relationship to God nothing not all our good works not all our religious obedience nor our status in society nor our material wealth nothing can take away our sin and restore our relationship to God other than that blood

[23 : 57] Jesus shed for us there this is how much it cost him to die for us and then lastly we see from this passage how God loved me when Jesus died for me how God loved me when Jesus died for me you know after all this talk of God being angry with our sin and of divine wrath the image you must have of God the father is dark and foreboding after all this is the God who was so offended by our sin that he commands the sacrifices of all these animals in Leviticus 1 the God who so grieved and angered by our transgression that it said of him in Isaiah 53 it was God's will to crush his son upon the cross what kind of God is this other than a cruel dark psychopath well that's how the evangelical atheists of our day paint him anyway the stern and judgmental

God of the Old Testament so different from the loving and forgiving God of the new to this the Bible objects in the strongest terms that he is the same God old and new the same means of atonement and salvation in the old and in the new the God of the New Testament is no less angry with sin than the God of the old the God of the Old New but it's here in Leviticus 1 I would argue we reach the high point of the gospel's presentation of our God as father a presentation that will fill your heart with joy and wonder how so how can it be possible that God the father is presented in such glowing colors in Leviticus 1 when after all it is his anger which must be appeased by the sacrifice of innocent animals let's go back to the text to the man who brings that sacrifice to the tabernacle to be offered to God and so we read in verse 2 when any of you brings an offering to the

Lord you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock that man chooses his offering and then he brings it to be sacrificed and slaughtered in his behalf and then we ask the question if Jesus is our atoning substitute if Jesus died for me then who offered him who brought him as an offering and here is the answer of the gospel it was the father himself who chose his son and offered him as the sacrifice for our sin repeatedly throughout the new testament God has said to have given his son donated his son for us God loved us to the extent that he found a way to satisfy his own justice through the gift of his only beloved son 75 years ago now the greatest new testament scholar of the 20th century the

American J. Gresham Machen was arguing against the kind of theologians who were outraged at the kind of God who demanded blood sacrifice for sin today's equivalence of Richard Dawkins Christian scholars who disagreed with the notion that God demanded satisfaction for our sin from the blood of his own son shed on the cross they proposed that Jesus died as an example for us as an example or died to shock us into behaving ourselves or died as some kind of unfortunate accident but Jesus did not die to satisfy God's just anger against our sin that's not the kind of God we want to follow well that's what they said Machen argued against them to show them a deeper level of divine love than ever they could have imagined he wrote these words collected shorter writings volume one this is the very heart of the sermon the very point of the

Christian view of the cross is that God does not wait for someone else to pay the price of sin but in his infinite love has himself paid the price for us God himself in the person of his son who loved us and gave himself for us God himself in the person of the father who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son God does not wait for someone else to pay the price of sin but in his infinite love has himself paid the price for us God himself presented his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin knowing full well the terrifying horrific consequence of his justice because of his infinite love for us God himself chose and brought his son to be sacrificed as our sin offering on our behalf

[29 : 55] God did not wait for someone else to pay the price of sin for there was no other good enough and there was no other who loved us enough if God did not wait to pay the price of our sin but freely gave his son up on the cross for us then why are you waiting so long before you'll put your faith and trust in him that's how much he loved you that he gave his son even as a man takes an animal to the tabernacle to be sacrificed well realizing why Jesus had to die for us and recognizing that however much a cost we have to pay for being a Christian it pales into insignificance beside the cost that Jesus had to pay to be your savior why are you waiting any longer come then come now and like a man bringing an animal to the tabernacle offer your heart to him offer your heart and your ambitions and your ambitions and your guilt and your guilt and your dreams and your dreams and your life let's pray glory thank you that all scripture is god breathed not just the bits we like and are attracted to but the bits that are hard to read and that all scripture points to

Jesus Christ just as surely as the sun is the center of our solar system and all the planets are in orbit around it so Jesus Christ is the center of your word and everything everything everything orbits him Lord if there's any here today who doubt your love or for whom your love is not something which matters which more important is who wins at Wimbledon or who wins the European Cup Lord we pray that you would assure them and drive home to them today that this is how much you love them that on account of their sin you sent your son to die the most horrific and terrifying holocaustal type death it's possible to die leave none of us unaffected we pray we ask these things in

Jesus name Amen