

The Day of Atonement

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[0 : 00] Now, I wonder who is here, a recent arrival to either Melbourne or Australia. I'm happy to put our hands up in the last couple of years. No one? No? Alright.

Not going to understand this illustration then. Okay. But, Barnabas, okay, you're pretending to be from outside, that's good. But I think if you ask someone who is a recent arrival to Melbourne or indeed Australia, they would sort of tell you how strange a sport Aussie rules is.

For example, why does the boundary umpire throw the ball in facing backwards? And, you know, putting the ball between his legs before he spins it back into the field.

Or the goal umpire with that weird hand gesture for a behind and then a goal. And then after that, he's waving that flag.

I mean, who is he waving to? And I could go on, couldn't I? The centre bounce or the ball up. The way you have to bounce the ball while you're running.

[1 : 13] Or the way you hand ball. Personally, I put it down to the weird shape of the ball. Now, I know you might say this is American football.

It's got the same shape, so has rugby ball. But I think, who in their right mind designs a ball like that? You know? At least with American football and rugby, when they pass the ball, you can see why, isn't it?

Because it actually works with the aerodynamics. You know, have you seen the quarterback throw? You can see the spinning of the ball. It makes sense. But with Aussie rules and the kick, the kick actually goes against aerodynamics, doesn't it?

It spins or whatever. It doesn't make sense. It's all very strange. And, you know, I can still remember it 30 years ago when I came. It all seemed rather strange when you first look at it.

But, of course, if you love the sport, as I know many of you are, because none of you seem convinced, you think nothing of it, right? You might even go, you know, this separates us from the outsiders.

[2 : 17] You know, this is our secret game, our secret handshake, our special code word. Now, as we resume our series in Leviticus, I feel like a lot of us might feel the same about this book.

Because, at first glance, it contains many, many strange things, doesn't it? Animal sacrifices, sprinkled blood, washing, burning.

And then if you look at chapter 11 to 15, some of these incomprehensible laws about food and how to clean your house when there's mold. It all seems very strange.

And, furthermore, how is that relevant to life today? Or even to us as a church? Well, if you stick with me, I'm hoping to be able to show you how.

Not just today, but in the coming weeks. But today, as we look at Leviticus chapter 16, we are arguably at the pinnacle of the entire book. For here, as I've said before, the Day of Atonement is described.

[3 : 22] And so important is this day that even today, Jews all over the world observe this very occasion. It's called Yom Kippur.

And you might have heard of it. Yom meaning day, Kippur meaning atonement. It's the most important date for them, even for secular Jews. And so even though as Christians we don't observe it, I want to explain to you just how significant it is.

So to do that, let's go back to the text in verse 1, where we return, as it were, back to the time of Israel in the wilderness. And so in verse 1, Now, the death of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, is actually described in chapter 10, where they offered, on the next slide, unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command.

So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Now, it's not clear exactly what they disobeyed, except that they did. But here, Moses is being given specific instructions to prevent history from repeating itself.

However, what their disobedience has revealed is that there is an intrinsic problem that God had with the priesthood and the people. You see, Aaron may have been appointed as the high priest to represent the people before God, but they were no different.

[5 : 09] That is, Aaron and his sons were no different to anyone else. They were imperfect. They were sinful. They fell short of God's holy requirements. And so, if the people relied on Aaron to mediate for them, that is, to represent them before God for their sins, who was going to mediate for Aaron?

Who was going to deal with Aaron's sins so that he will not die when he approaches God?

Because, as you can see in verse 1 and 2, that's the very issue here, isn't it? Aaron can't come however he chooses, or he will die.

That's the problem. Now, you may think God is rather nasty here. Why make it so difficult? Surely, he could just overlook Aaron's imperfections. But if you read the words carefully, you notice that it comes across not so much as if God has a choice in this matter, but actually, very matter-of-factly, that Aaron will die.

It doesn't say God will put Aaron to death. It just says Aaron will die. Just a matter-of-fact. It's a bit like gravity. Don't dangle your phone out of a high-rise window.

I don't know whether you've ever done that, but if it slips from your hand, it will definitely fall to the ground, right? It's not something that can be avoided. It's not like you can tell gravity not to act on that phone.

[6 : 30] Gravity always is in force, everywhere and every time. The same goes for this paper cut-out man here.

I had this made for me by someone in the family. I've been told it's in my likeness. But what happens if I brought this close to a naked flame?

It will burn, wouldn't it? Fire is fire, and by its very nature, it will consume the paper with its heat. Otherwise, it's no longer fire, is it?

And that's the way with God. His very nature is holiness, and He has to respond to sin with judgment. Otherwise, He ceases to be God.

That's the very nature of God, to be holy. And yet, the Bible also says that God is gracious and merciful, that it is also part of His nature to show compassion for His people.

[7 : 36] He desires, in this case, to dwell with Israel and be in relationship with them. And so you see, there is a problem, isn't there? And actually, the problem is God's problem.

Because by nature, He has to deal with sin and also to show His love for humanity. How is that going to be reconciled?

What's going to give? That's why the Day of Atonement is needed. And in particular, a way had to be found for the high priest to approach God on behalf of His people to provide a means by which God then can relate to Israel.

And this way, the way that God provides, can only be done by the high priest approaching the most holy place behind the curtain at the Ark of the Covenant once a year.

And even then, when Aaron appears, God has to do it in smoke, as it were, to cloak His presence. Now, if you're not familiar, there's a slide on the screen.

[8 : 39] The most holy place, top, bottom line, sorry, is actually in the tent of meeting or the tabernacle. And then if you look further up on the second image on top, the tabernacle itself is in the courtyard and then that is in the midst of the camp.

It is from there, right in the middle of the tent, that cloud of smoke rises to symbolize God's presence in their midst.

So that is, in the middle of the camp, everyone is able to look up and be assured that God is with them, that He's guiding them, protecting them, leading them wherever they may be. But for God to be able to do this, their sin had to be dealt with.

And so, really, the whole book of Leviticus is dealing with this problem. The sacrifices and the offering were stipulated to deal with the people's sin generally, as well as to purify the tent and purify the priesthood.

But here, in chapter 16, God deals specifically with how the high priest is able to approach God once a year by entering the most holy place.

[9 : 49] Now, it's not much, is it? Once a year, one man, and, you know, with blood, but it's actually better than nothing, is it?

And for this to occur, what needs to happen, what needs to happen is that atonement, which I'll explain a bit later, atonement had to be made in the most holy place for the high priest and his household and then also for his people.

So the place, the most holy place, had to be, atonement had to happen there and it had to happen not just for the people but for the high priest and the household as well.

And if you look at the rest of the chapter, which we'll read, these are essentially God's stipulations for that day. Beginning in verse 3 to 5 where we are told what Aaron has to bring and what he has to wear.

So, reading on the slide, this is how Aaron is to enter the most holy place. He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to put on sacred linen tunic with linen undergarments next to his body.

[10 : 59] He is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. From the Israelite community, he is to then take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

So, in total, there are five animals that are required and on the next slide you see how it's been divided. A bull, the sin offering for Aaron and his household. Then the two goats, the sin offering for the people and then the two rams, one each for burnt offerings for Aaron and then for the people. All these offerings collectively are needed to make atonement. This whole process is really one thing of making atonement but different animals serve different purposes and for different people. However, what is different between the two offerings of sin and burnt offering is that the burnt offering is a voluntary offering. So, if you look through the rest of Leviticus, every time a burnt offering is offered and done right, it produces an aroma because there was a burning of the fat but what it does, it is considered to be pleasing to the Lord.

With the sin offering, though such phrase is used to describe that. Now, as for the garments, let me say a bit about that. They are to be of plain linen. So, the tunic, the turban and the undergarments on the slide, it looks very plain and again, we're going to contrast that with the regular garments later on.

[12 : 31] And so, once all these are prepared, next is being explained what then is to be done with it. Now, the passage is quite long and Will has already read it so I'm not going to read it again.

But essentially, God goes through it in order of what needs to be done. So, verse 6 to 10 deals firstly with the sin offerings. First, the sin offering for Aaron and his household.

Then, the two goats, one is to be chosen by Lot to be sacrificed for the people. The other is called the scapegoat because it will be sent into the wilderness. Then, in verse 11, the sin offering for the high priest is described.

It's the sacrifice for the bull. And this day of atonement, sin offering of the bull is actually unique.

There are other sin offerings in Leviticus, but on this very day, the blood of the animal, this is the only time that the blood of the animal is being able to be taken into the most holy place.

Other times, it's just on the outside in the tent and at the altar in the courtyard. Only on this day is it brought into the most holy place because atonement is being made for the most holy place.

[13 : 40] Thus, Aaron can go behind the curtain and not die when he brings the blood in there. So, verse 12, he is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.

He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the tablets of the covenant law so that he will not die. Again, there's a screen, isn't it?

He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover when he shall, then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

And then the same thing happens in verse 15 but this time with the goat's blood because that is the sin offering for the people. So this is atonement at the most holy place for the people.

Again, same thing is done and then the blood of both of these are progressively sprinkled so he's done it at the most holy place then he's to come out and do it at the tent of meeting and then he's to come out again and do it on the altar in the courtyard.

[14 : 47] So moving from the most holy place and then moving outwards almost to say signify that atonement is sort of being done progressively in ever widening circles until it impacts the whole of Israel.

And so we read in verse 20 when Aaron has finished making atonement for the most holy place the tent of meeting and the altar then he shall bring forward the life goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the life goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites all their sins and put them on the goat's head.

He shall send the goat away in the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. And what's the reason for this? The goat will carry on itself all their sins all their sins to a remote place and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

Now if you've ever wondered this is where the word scapegoat comes from right? Scape is short form for escape which means the goat is able to depart but it's not really escaping in that sense because when it's released into the wilderness it's highly unlikely it's going to survive for one because it's the wilderness not much food there but symbolically it is also bearing all the sins of the people on its head.

It's taking the sins of the people far far away from the camp and never to return. So one goat's blood is used for atonement before God in the temple or in the tabernacle the other goat carries the sins of all the people away from God's presence and taken together what they represent is how God has dealt with the people's sin.

[16 : 29] It's as the psalmist would say in Psalm 103 verse 12 next slide I think as far as the east is from the west as far as the wilderness is from the camp so far has God removed our transgressions Israel's transgressions from us.

That's the effect of what has just happened when atonement has been made for the people and for Aaron. And when all that's done Aaron can then now re-enter the tent verse 24 he can wash and change into his regular garments.

Now the regular garments is actually more colourful than the sacred garments alright it's actually the other way around. The regular garments is what you see on the slide here it's the colourful garb which we've looked at before in Exodus.

And there's a change of clothes because what it signifies is a change to Aaron's position. When he entered the most holy place he did so as the people's representative.

He was coming before God humble and contrite naked almost nothing to hide from God and with nothing to offer except the animal's blood which the animal had to give their lives for.

[17 : 44] But now when he puts on these regular garments he takes on the function as it were of receiving the sacrifice on God's behalf. As he's taking the burnt offering he's the people giving it to him to offer to God.

He's now God's person to the people. And the burnt offering which we will come to now is no different to all the other burnt offerings in Leviticus or throughout the year only this time the fat of the sin offering remember the burnt offering is the ram the sin offering is the bull and the goats this time the fat of the sin offering is also burnt at the altar.

Normally with the other times when the sin offering is offered the priest can actually eat of the flesh it's sort of given to him and his family as part of his provision.

But on this day he can't even eat the flesh of the animal. Instead the flesh is taken outside the camp and is burnt with the rest of the bull. So the entire animal is dealt with one way or another either as a blood the sin offering or taken out with the hide and everything else and burnt.

Such is the effect of sin though that the two people that are required to handle the scapegoat and the remains and when they leave the camp and they take these things and they handle these things they become unclean and that's why in verse 26 to 28 before they come in they actually have to wash their clothes and bathe before they can rejoin the community.

[19 : 21] So these 28 verses then essentially are flown through them but these are the stipulations that form the day of atonement. Now I don't know whether you've been staying with me up till now but the question still remains what has this to do with us?

Why is it relevant for us to know these things? Well I think the first thing it shows is that sin is a serious thing to God. No matter how minuscule it is sin separates us from God and that hasn't changed since the time of Moses.

God is still holy and his attitude to sin remains the same and sin is not just what we do you know tell the lie here or there or lose our temper sin is who we are.

That is our pride our selfish nature that's all sin and that all these things are impediments to us approaching God so much so that if we did it on our own merits we would still be consumed by God's holy fire.

But the other thing that's also true and that has not changed is God's grace isn't it because that's his nature and God's nature is unchanging and so just as he provided a way for Aaron to approach him and through Aaron for the people to relate to him so this is true of us today as well except that now God has provided a more lasting and permanent lasting and perfect solution and he's provided the person of Jesus his son you see unlike Aaron Jesus is perfect without a single blemish and unlike bulls and goats Jesus is human just like us and the whole idea of atonement really is that wrong that is done against God has to be accounted for that's just what justice demands that's what justice is when there's wrong there needs to be punishment whether punishment or reparation wrong has to be accounted for and by rights the sinner himself must pay with his own life if I sin my life is the one that should be on the line but God has provided a substitute back on the day of atonement the substitutes were animals but today it is the Lord

[21 : 50] Jesus and it's not hard isn't it when you look back at the day of atonement to just see that these animals really can't do the job can they their sacrifice will never suffice because how can seriously bulls and goats substitute for a human only a human can be an acceptable substitute for another isn't it and so the day of atonement at the end of the day even though it works for a time was merely symbolic but this is entirely different with Jesus isn't it because as a human and a perfect human at that his death on the cross is an acceptable atoning sacrifice for our sins and that's why in the reading that Vanessa read in Hebrews chapter 9 we read this but when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands that is to say is 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 thus obtaining eternal redemption 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 merely outwardly clean how much more how much more then will the blood of

Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our conscience from eggs that lead to death so that we may serve the living God this explanation is pretty clear isn't it the day of atonement merely foreshadows what Jesus will do and where else the blood of goats and bulls were merely outwardly ceremonial Jesus Jesus' blood cleanses us to our very conscience deep down is what he's saying right into our hearts that we are truly forgiven that we're made clean that we can be standing before God and not have to feel shame or guilt because Jesus' blood cleanses us to our very conscience and the thing is that when Jesus died he did not just take his blood into a physical holy place he brought it into

God's very presence in his eternal heavenly eternal throne and so Derek Titball who writes a commentary on Leviticus would write this Aaron entered an earthly tabernacle Christ a heavenly one Aaron offered sacrifices for his own sin Christ was sinless Aaron offered the blood of bulls and goats Christ offered his own blood Aaron repeated the sacrifices annually Christ offered it once for all Aaron's action secured temporary atonement Christ secured permanent forgiveness can you see that contrast Jesus is actually the ultimate high priest that Aaron was merely a shadow of only Jesus can enable us to approach God and truly atone for our sins so that we can be in eternal permanent relationship with God and that's a great thing isn't it but how then shall we respond in light of this well if we go back to

Leviticus to the final five verses in 29 to 34 God explained to Israel what they were to do and specifically verse 29 and 31 God said to them they were to deny themselves or literally to afflict their souls and then he says that that means for a start doing no work but observing a Sabbath rest now I think that to deny themselves was more than that that's why some of them decided to go and fast but whatever it meant it meant stepping away from the daily pleasures of life and that was done to express repentance they were to down tools stop what they were doing look at what was happening with the high priest at the tabernacle and then be prompted to recognize why that was

needed that as they saw the sacrifices of the animals being sacrificed it gave them pause to reflect on their own sin under the harsh microscope of God's holiness and friends we may prefer to avoid this but that's the reality for us isn't it as well just as far as fire

God is God and we might get angry at God for that but that's not going to change the truth we might bury our heads in the sand and try and ignore it but that's not going to change the truth we may even think that we're better than we are and therefore it doesn't apply to us but if we're honest we can only just search ourselves inside the fact that we feel shame and guilt is actually our conscience telling us that this is true that before God we don't have any leg to stand on so the question I want to put to you is how often do you actually take the time to pause from our busy lives from our pursuit of pleasure or whatever else we're driven by to face up to these facts that actually before God we have no leg to stand on apart from Jesus that is because unless we recognize our own imperfection and sin we don't get to the next stage isn't it we don't try we don't seek out after God and find in him the joy of Sabbath rest rest you see

[27 : 53] Sabbath rest is not just about stopping work that's just rest but the word here is Sabbath rest and Sabbath rest is about finding true rest in our lives deep and lasting rest and that means coming an end to restlessness in our lives you know how a lot of us even when we don't work we feel restless right we don't really know where we're going what that's restlessness isn't it finding Sabbath rest is finding a rest or finding a solution for our lives that means that we're not restless anymore and that only comes when we found someone to rest upon and that rest we find in Jesus as our saviour trusting and depending on him all of us can have that when we ask Jesus to take our place to be our scapegoat and he's already done that on the cross all we need to do is believe in him and our sins will be taken far far away from us we're forgiven for good

God remembers our sin no more and we enter in a relationship with him but let me also end with one more amazing thing and that is unlike the Israelites you know if you notice even as God has forgiven them the Israelites did not get an opportunity did they to enter the most holy place only Aaron could do that once a year but you know with Jesus we are able to enter and draw near to God enter into the most holy place into his very presence by God's spirit not once a year but every moment of our lives when we believe in Jesus each time we pray each time we gather as a church we're actually coming into God's presence by his spirit and even right now actually for those of us who believe we are now in God's very throne room just think about that we are physically nowhere here in Doncaster 106 church road but spiritually we are in God's presence now part of that will make you hopefully shake in your boots but the other part of you should be finding joy in Sabbath rest because Jesus is with us and when we believe in him his blood shields us from God's holy fire and so what's the only response to that well I think the only response is to bow in awe and worship and praise so let's do that right now let me finish with prayer with praise with worship with awe father we acknowledge that we are not worthy to come to you because of our sinfulness but thank you thank you because of Jesus blood we can approach boldly into your presence into your throne room and find acceptance and love and joy and forgiveness before you give us faith and repentance help us to rest in Jesus work on the cross and to live in obedience to him in the name of Jesus our eternal high priest we pray amen princess and opportunity gift and whole