

Leviticus 16:20-24 AM

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] You will find it a help if you open your Bible to Leviticus chapter 16 on page 95. Leviticus 16, we come to the most important, the most holy day in the year for Israel.

It is the day of atonement, Yom Kippur. It is the one day of the year where the one most holy person in all of Israel, the high priest, is allowed to enter physically into the, well very close to the presence of the God of gods, into the holy of holies.

And where the sins of all the people are purified and then sent away outside the camp on a scapegoat. And it's so important, it's right at the centre, the hinge point of the book of Leviticus. And that means it's right at the centre of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. And in some ways, it is the crown of the whole system of rituals and ceremonies and sacrifices and offerings.

And why is it given to us? And why are we reading it? Because it helps us make sense of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. That's where we're going to go.

[1 : 25] So this morning, we're going to have some diagrams. We're going to spend some time in Leviticus 16. Then we're going to head over and do Hebrews 9. So just make sure your cars are parked in safe places.

So look at the beginning of Leviticus 16. It opens verse 1 with the reminder that God's holiness is a matter of life and death. You see verse 1, it takes place on the very same day that the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had died.

Because they showed contempt and disregard of the holiness of God coming to God on his own terms. So verse 1, 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 into the holy place inside the veil before the mercy seat that is on the ark so that he may not die.

For I will appear in cloud over the mercy seat. But in this way Aaron shall come into the holy place. And then we go into the rest of chapter 16.

[2 : 36] So the whole point of the day of atonement is that God desires to continue to dwell with his people. And he makes it possible by this day of atonement which is full of drama and desire and danger.

And all the ceremonies of Leviticus and particularly this one reveal to us the holiness of God and the sinfulness of humanity. And God's desire to build a bridge and to dwell with us.

Perhaps it's truer to say that Leviticus and the day of atonement reveal that God is a God of holy love. That his holiness is so unimaginably pure and beautiful that he recoils of evil or uncleanness or any form of sin.

But that he is so full of love that he finds a way to do this. Let me just make a comment here. Have you ever thought about the fact that God would have no wrath at all if it weren't for evil and sin? It's only sin that creates the reaction in our holy God. God is by nature merciful, abounding in steadfast love. His character is wrath.

[3 : 58] He is, sorry, his character is love. It's not wrath. And the old, let me say that again. Just in case we missed that. So in the Old Testament, it describes God's wrath as his alien work.

His strange work. It's the thing that is stimulated by evil. But he is not in himself. His quality, his character is not wrathful. He is love, holy love.

And Leviticus reveals his holy love so that he makes a way to find, he finds a way so that we can live with him by, and here's the key word, atonement.

By finding a way to cover and take away sin, not to count his people's sin against them so that he might dwell with them. And the ceremonies and the rituals in chapter 16 are a little bit complicated.

So I thought I would show you some pictures. Picture number one. Look at that. Now you saw this last week. And for those of you very alert watchers, one of the arrows has changed direction.

[5 : 08] The point of this is that the first 15 chapters of Leviticus set up this three-tiered system of looking at reality. Things are holy, or they're clean, or they're unclean.

And this is a way of saying that holiness is completely incompatible with uncleanness. And there is something at work in all of us that moves us down the scale away from God and his holiness toward uncleanness, and that is sin.

Sin makes it impossible for us to draw near to God or to be in contact with God. But notice there are three categories, not just two.

It's not just clean and unclean. There's holiness. Because God's intention is to make us holy so that we might dwell with him forever. And the way he does that is by atonement.

And the way he does atonement is by blood. So blood, as we saw last week, has a very special significance in the sacrificial system. It's the way God provides us with reversing the effects of our sin and uncleanness.

[6 : 16] That's the first picture. Now the second picture. Here is a photograph of the camp of Israel. That was a joke. This is a painting.

And God arranged the camp in such a way that he dwelt right at the center of his people. So all the tribes around about could see the visual reminder of his holy love and the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire over the tent of meeting where God dwelt.

And at the center of the camp was the tent of meeting, sometimes called the tabernacle. And where did the idea of the tabernacle come from? It was God's idea.

God revealed it to Moses in the book of Exodus when he's up on the mountain talking to God in the cloud. And God says, here is the plan for a little earthly tent.

It is a copy patterned on my heavenly dwelling as though God has a little earthly dwelling place like his home in heaven.

[7 : 21] A little mind-blowing. Third picture. This is a map of the tabernacle. Let me explain. I told you some of this would be new.

The tabernacle was a large open courtyard protected with a high curtain all on four sides, one place of entry near the altar.

And when you came to offer your gift to God or a sacrifice for sin, the first thing you saw when you came in was this great big altar on which the animals were sacrificed. And your grains and incense. And behind it was a massive wash basin for cleansing. But the key thing about this is that in the courtyard there was a tent. And the tent had two separate compartments.

Two separate rooms. And both sections were protected by a heavy curtain of veil. And there was only one entrance through the holy place into the first section.

[8 : 22] And then through another tent into the holy of holies. The first section is often called the holy place. And it had a lamp stand, a seven-fold lamp stand and a table for bread on the right.

And it also had a little altar where you would burn incense leading into the second section. And the only people allowed into that holy place were the priests who came daily to tend the bread, to tend the fire, and to eat bread in the presence of God.

But it's the second section that's the most important. And that is called the most holy place or the holy of holies. Remember, please, there's a test at the end of the sermon on all these things.

And in this little room behind the curtain was the Ark of the Covenant. And only one person could go in once a year taking the blood of bulls and goats for his own sin.

And he sprinkled it on the Ark as an atonement for his sins. Last picture. This is the Ark. It's a box. It's about 50, 52 inches, 31 inches wide and 31 inches high.

[9 : 38] How grateful we are that it was found by, who is it, Indy and the Raiders of the Lost Ark. So it's made of acacia wood and it's covered with pure gold.

And inside the Ark are the two stone tablets the God wrote with his very own finger, which have the law, the Ten Commandments on it. And there's a little jar of manna, which comes in a bit later, manna from heaven, the bread, and Aaron's rod that God used to show his power to Pharaoh.

But the key part of the Ark is the lid. It is called the mercy seat. And on the lid were two cherubim, angel-like figures at either end, bowing toward the center, facing each other with outstretched wings like so.

It was the earthly throne of grace. It was the place on earth where God sat enthroned upon the cherubim. And this is where the high priest was to enter and to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, this one day of the year.

This is the place that God said, I will dwell amongst my people. And this is the place where I would speak to my people. And it simply means as God covers the sins with this mercy seat, that God and humans could be reconciled as their sins were covered.

[11:06] Is that okay so far? Just make a grunt of a... Thank you. Very helpful. Okay.

Now I've got two points. One from Leviticus 16 and one from Hebrews 9 about all this. Hebrews 16 is about the temporary atonement.

And I think the best way to grasp the whole chapter is through the three major atoning acts, the three key animals. So let's look at that a little bit, shall we?

The first atoning act is the sacrifice of a bull which atones for the sins of Aaron and his family. So if you see at the end of verse 2, the Lord tells Aaron he must do everything according to his words so that he does not die.

There's nothing casual and cavalier about worship of the living God. And in verse 4, before Aaron does any high priestly work, before he offers any sacrifices, he is to take off his gorgeous high priestly garments that he wore on a daily basis.

[12:16] Those high priestly garments we talked about two weeks ago that make him look like royalty. And he is to wash himself and he puts on four simple garments of white linen, shirt, shorts, sash and a turban.

Because on this day of atonement, Aaron is to move into a different world where God is. And though it is the highest human privilege for him, before the king of kings, he is a servant, he is a slave, and that's the clothing of a slave.

And he needs forgiveness for his own sins just as desperately as the rest of Israel does. So he then takes a bull and offers it for sacrifice for himself, verse 6, and for his whole household.

But before he takes the blood into the holy of holies, the most holy place, in verses 12 and 13, he puts a whole great pile of incense on the coals in front of the most holy place to create a cloud so that when he goes in to the holy, the most holy place, he won't be able to directly see the Lord on his mercy seat.

And even the cloud acts as a sort of a protective screen for him. Then he takes the blood of the bull, verse 14, and he goes in and he sprinkles it seven times on the mercy seat between the cherubim.

[13:44] And at the time Aaron chooses the bull, he also chooses two goats, one as a sin offering and one as a scapegoat.

So let's look at those two together. Firstly, the bull. Now the second act of atonement is the goat number one, the sin offering. Verse 15, Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, that is, for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with the blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

But what's unique about this, the blood of this goat, is that it atones not just for the people, but for all sorts of other things. Look at verse 16.

Thus he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel and their transgressions and all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness.

It's not just the people of God that need atonement. It's the tabernacle itself. And in verse 18, it's the altar itself. And even the holy place itself needs atoning, simply because by contamination, God has been living in the midst of a sinful people, and God's dwelling place has become contaminated and polluted.

[15:11] And it must be cleansed and it must be purified. Otherwise, they will all die, or God must leave. Very powerful ritual reminder of God's love and his holiness.

That's the second atoning act. Then the third act is the second goat, who is the scapegoat. And in some ways, this is the most dramatic moment of the day for all the people, because Aaron brings the goat outside the tabernacle, where everyone can see, and he lays his two hands on the head of the goat, and he transfers all the sins of God's people onto the head of the goat, as he confesses the sins of Israel.

And in verse 21, it says he confesses all the sins and all the iniquities and all the transgressions. And I don't know how you do that. I mean, maybe he worked through the Ten Commandments.

You know, Lord our God, you've brought us out of Egypt to be our God, and we're your people. You're abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, who loves us and desires our love, but we've not loved you first with all our hearts.

We've not trusted you. And that's shown in the way that we grumble and complain and quickly turn selfish and have contempt for others, and we've committed sexual sins, and we've lied and stolen and coveted and been proud and superior and selfish and harsh and controlling, not forgiving others, growing bitter and cynical, being angry about trivial sins.

[16:46] And then he looks across another part of the crowd and goes, we've been careless about the important things. And if he was an Anglican, he would just say, we've done what we shouldn't have done, and we haven't done what we ought to have done, and there is no health in us.

And I don't know how long this went for, but he's got his both hands. It's the only time in the year when both hands go on the head of an animal. He's got his both hands on the head of this poor goat, and he's consigning the goat to be cut off from life so it will remove the sins far away.

And maybe he says at the end of the prayer, and I'm just imagining this, we dream and pray for the day when the true scapegoat will come who will take our sins as far as the east is from the west from us permanently. That's just David saying that.

And in verse 22, he sends the goat off to, quote, a remote area which is literally to the land of cutting off.

It's not just a, you know, it might wander back in. It's the place of death so that the sins might be removed. And it is an amazing and transparent ritual, isn't it?

[17:56] That God can't dwell with sin. That his desire is to save us from all that ruins and destroys and separates. He wants to save us and separate us from our sins.

And he does it by sending one or providing one who will bear our sins away. It's the picture of substitution, which would be repeated year after year after year after year.

And if you take those two goats together, it tells us that we need more than our sins taken away. We also need the purification as well, because we can be made clean, but we need to be made holy.

And I think as we just pause at the end of chapter 16, we begin to see how powerful this day would be year after year after year.

And one of the things that God is doing here is he is stirring up the longing for his people to be with him. Yes, he's present there in the camp, and then he was in the temple when they went into the land.

[19:02] And there is something about the presence of God that is magnetic and compelling. It's the thing we desire above all things. It's the desire underneath all our other desires for people or for things.

It's God, the fountain and source of blessing. But we can never, we could never in the Old Testament enter his direct presence. But knowing he's there and knowing he's providing a way, constantly making a way for us to be with him, only increases the longing for him and prepares us for the astonishing wonder of what Jesus has done.

So I want to turn from the temporary atonement, secondly, to the perfect atonement. So if you would turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 9, which is on page 1005.

And I'm going to turn to page 1006 and just read from verse 11. Now, with all those thoughts bouncing around in your brain, you might have some questions about them.

Let me read you a couple of verses of what God has done in Jesus Christ. And as I read these, I want you to see just how brilliantly God has set us up for these. So I'm going to read from verse 11 to 14.

[20:26] But when Christ appeared as the high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, the outside, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living and true God.

So what God has done in Jesus Christ is not just fulfill the Old Testament ritual of a day of atonement. He has triumphed in ways that are infinitely superior to the old covenant. But we wouldn't understand them unless we had the old covenant, the Old Testament. And what the writer says here is there are three ways that Christ has done this that are infinitely superior to the Old Testament.

And the first is, he's gone to the infinitely superior place. So the tent that God gave Moses and his people, and this is why I had a diagram up there, with the holy place and the holy of holies.

[22 : 10] That's an earthly copy of God's dwelling in heaven. And just as Aaron had to purify that holy place because of human sin, here is a mind-blowing thought.

In his ascension, Jesus has gone into the perfect tent, the place of God's dwelling in heaven, and purified it for us. So look down at verse 23.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands, the tent in the wilderness, the temple, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Isn't that amazing? If he hasn't just purified the tent in the desert, he's gone into the dwelling of God, into heaven, the place we long to be, the face we long to see, where we couldn't go because of our sin.

[23 : 19] And Jesus has opened the way so that now we might draw near to the very throne of grace to God himself. So the infinitely superior place. Second, by an infinitely superior sacrifice.

This is the how much more of verse 14. How much more will the blood of Christ? Because Jesus didn't offer the blood of an animal to God. He offered his own blood.

He offered his life in death. He was not a passive victim like the goat or the bull. I mean, I thought I could use the children's thing this morning with the sheep that had died being thrown around like this, but we've had enough of dead animals today.

He's not like that. He's the perfect son of God without sin or blemish and the power of his eternal life. And he fully, consciously, obediently gave himself over to the will of God in dying for us.

And he takes our sins on himself and becomes the completely perfect scapegoat and then purifies us by his blood forever, entirely and completely, out of love so that we might draw near.

[24 : 32] Isn't that great? Just say yes. So it's an infinitely superior place, an infinitely superior sacrifice, and thirdly, there's an infinitely superior outcome.

Because the weakness of all the Old Testament rituals is that they brought outward cleansing. But they can't cleanse the consciences of Old Testament believers.

But the blood of Jesus Christ is able to purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living and true God. We're now set free from the inward weight of sin with a changed heart.

And if we had time this morning, which we've just about run out of, we could trace through the rest of Hebrews what the dramatic implications and applications of that are in day-to-day life.

Let me mention them to you, just some of them. To be freed from the guilty conscience means it leads to a life of brotherly love and sisterly love and of hospitality and of caring for those in need.

[25 : 36] To a life free from greed and the love of money and free from sexual immorality. To a life that's regular in worship and a submission to the spiritual leaders who teach the word of God.

All of these things are laid out in the rest of Hebrews, which I think we're going to look at in two years' time. So, so brothers and sisters, as we move toward Easter this year, here is my encouragement to you.

We need to meditate on what Jesus has done for us so that we can draw near and then draw near to him with a full assurance of faith. Ask him today to give you a greater longing for his presence and then think about how to stir up those around you to love and good works and don't neglect to meet together but encourage each other and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

And that's the point of the day of attainment. Amen. Amen.