

Leviticus 16:20-24 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 March 2024

Preacher: Rev. Mark Ashworth

[0 : 00] As we begin, let's spend a moment or two in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word opens up to us.

Opens up to us the way we should see the world. We need your eyes. We need to see what you see. And we also need to feel what we truly need in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for this passage and help us to grasp it as we look at two passages tonight. May your spirit lead us and guide us. Amen. If you have a Bible in front of you or just behind you, if you're at the very front, grab a Bible.

We're looking and starting in Leviticus and then we're going to jump to Hebrews. So, double header, strap yourself in. I hope you brought some late night snacks. This might take a while. No, it won't.

But it would be great for us to look at the Bible passage that was read earlier on. Leviticus chapter 16, 20 to 34. Let me ask, as you open up that Bible page, who is the goat?

[1 : 08] Who is the goat? Now, I heard this first and I just thought that sounds bizarre. Are you taking me to Narnia, where there was kind of half man, half goat? Actually, as I understand it today, if you ask, who is the goat?

You're asking, who's the greatest of all time? So, if you're like me, a little bit old, then goat means the greatest of all time.

So, if someone said to you, who's the goat when it comes down to soccer? Lionel Messi, Ronaldo, shout out. Ronaldo! Ronaldo, I didn't ask who you liked best. But anyway, he is lovely, isn't he?

He is lovely. I could ask you, who's the goat on the ice hockey? Who would the answer be?

Gretzky, Gretzky, pretty much. You're Canadian, it's definitely going to be Gretzky.

Or we could go to any number of areas. Politicians! Okay, that's awkward silence there. But anyway, we can ask, who is the greatest of all time?

[2 : 14] And it won't surprise you that I'm going to get you to the place where you realise that Jesus is the goat. Okay? Jesus is the goat. But let me explain to you why we're going to get there.

I'll tell you why. Because, of course, he is the goat of goats. He is the greatest of all time. Forever. And ever. And will be. So when you're talking about kings, and there have been some great kings, there's actually only one king of kings.

And that's the goat king Jesus. Greatest of all time. King Jesus. But maybe we're not talking about kingship. Maybe we're talking about other areas that are about being great.

He is the greatest king of all times. But he's also the lord of lords. He's also so much more. But I want us also, as we look at the day of attainment, to realise that he really is the goat in the story today.

He is the goat. In fact, he is two goats and a bull and everything all wrapped up in one. He's the priest. He is the prophet. He is the king. He is what the whole of the Old Testament was showing you in a small, imperfect, temporary, not good enough way.

[3 : 39] You get to see in Jesus. Perfected. And that's where we're going to go today. So I'll ask the question, what has the Day of Atonement?

It's called Yom Kippur, and it's a day. What has that got to do with us today? We're not Jewish. We know about Christmas and Easter, but does anybody here celebrate the Day of Atonement?

Does anybody know when it is? Like, to what extent should we be looking at the Old Testament and celebrating what happened that day? Well, I think today, this Bible passage helps us to answer some of the really, really, really big questions in life.

So I do hope that you'll stay with me as we investigate this Day of Atonement, the day that Jesus is truly the goat of goats.

But let me ask a bigger question. Have you ever been asked, how can a good God allow such evil? Have you ever heard that? Have you ever met someone who basically says, look, I know you're a Christian, I know you're religious, but actually there's no chance I'm going to be religious because there's so much suffering and bad in the world.

[4 : 52] There's so much evil. And a good God would step in and sort it out. Have you heard that argument? Have you heard that conversation? If you haven't, start having conversations with people on the streets because, trust me, there's a lot of people asking that question.

Or maybe ask you another question. How can a just God allow murderers to go free? How can someone who committed murder suddenly become a Christian and then everybody thinks he's absolutely fine and all right?

Is that a question that Christians don't wrestle with? Surely if someone is that bad, how can he be set free and go to heaven?

Or maybe this question, which is directed at you. How can a holy God love an unholy me?

You look at me and you see my collar and you see my jacket and you know that I've been through vicar school. But the reality is quite simple. If you really knew me on the inside, what I think and what I don't do as well as what I do do, how can a holy God have anything to do with me?

[6 : 12] Well, if any of those questions are questions that you ask or maybe you're sat there awkwardly, today's the day. That this Bible passage, these two passages, help us to see the answer as we have a little look.

Let's jump into Leviticus. Aaron's been really helpful over the last couple of weeks. If you've joined us today for the first time, we've been looking at Leviticus and we're going to get to Hebrews. But this is the point as we've seen progressive revelation, i.e. We're journeying with the people in the Old Testament as they understand more and more and more and more about how much God loves them.

But also more and more and more about how bad they are. And if you don't read the whole of the Old Testament and go, what a mess, then you need to reread it. The picture is that progressively God has shown us our need for salvation.

That we need, we need a big answer. We need a greater king, a goat king. We need a greater prophet, the goat prophet. We need a goat priest.

[7 : 19] And all of the prophets, priests and kings that you have in the Old Testament have been good for a while. And then they often sin, even the great names like David and Abraham.

We've been studying on Friday nights. We've been looking at Abraham and he is the man of faith. And yet he disowned his wife twice. We see the humanity, even a man like that, a great man of faith.

The reality is he's a little man having great faith in a great God. Not a man with great faith in a little God. That's the difference. And so as we look at all of the Old Testament, we see this.

Increasingly so. The people of God, as they sin and sin, they end up, they end up, basically, it's like just the leftovers of sin and rebellion.

It's the kind of thing that no one would ever desire or dream of. And so when you get an unholy people with a holy God, what do you do? You can't mix the two.

[8 : 31] You can't just water down the sin and pretend it never happened. And that's what happens in Leviticus.

We get to see how a holy God mixes with an unholy people in a way that doesn't tarnish or bring God down to unholy and dirty and disgusting.

We see a shocking picture. Right, let's jump in. Let's jump in. Two things to keep in mind. Two things to keep in mind. As we look at these, there are purity laws, there are priests, and there are rituals.

Three things to make that, to some extent, presentable to God in the tabernacle. This place where God was to meet his people. Two things that you need to remember is, number one is that we are like that.

We are unholy and need to be clean. And so they'll be doing lots of cleaning rituals. They'll be doing some sacrifices. They'll be taking the blood of a lamb and they'll be splattering the bull blood, the ram's blood.

[9 : 36] They'll be basically splattering it over the temple. And not to get it dirty, but actually as a sign of the lifeblood that cleanses.

And so actually, although it might feel like it's dirty because we're splattering blood all over it, it was a strong picture of cleaning. When your mum and dad ask you to do some cleaning, think Hoover. Don't think blood splattering. Okay? But actually in the Holy Book of Hope, this is the picture. In the tabernacle, that's exactly what happened. The blood was used, the lifeblood was used to cleanse, to clean.

So number one, the first thing that we need to think about is God cleaning. And we're going to see that God not only cleans people, but he cleans the actual tabernacle. But secondly, it's a reminder of God's desire to be with us.

God's desire to be with us.

[10:58] And can I have lift home when you're there? And are wanting to say, can you walk or catch the bus? But anyway, but that's the picture. The picture is this, is that God longs to be with us.

Even though we are dirty, sinful, rebellious, he longs to be with us. And has found this way to make the impossible possible. He's to clean us, that we can be made holy and join him.

So let's jump in at this Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, Leviticus chapter 16. It comes in the middle of the Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible.

We get this kind of, this is the middle. It's like climbing up the mountain. We're going to get to the peak today, the Day of Atonement. And then as you look out for the rest of the Pentateuch, the rest of those books, you're going to see how it changes everything.

It changes into a relationship with God. So the Day of Atonement is the day once a year, once. This is the one and only time.

[12:00] When the high priest would enter the place to atone for the people. To atone for the people's sins. It's the day when judgment and mercy meet.

And justice. And wrath. And it all kind of gets pulled together in one amazing act. Atone means to make payment for.

It means to ransom, to cover up. And in the Bible you'll see the Ark of the Covenant has a lid. The mercy seat it's called. Or it's called the atonement cover.

It covers over the sin. It reminds them in the box of the buddied staff. It reminds them of the Ten Commandments. And to be honest with you, they're permanent reminders of how sinful they are.

That's what they are. Each and every rebellion story in the Old Testament, you get reminded by the Ark of the Covenant. And so this lid covers it. It almost protects and keeps it contained.

[12:59] So what happens on this day of atonement? The day of atonement, we get the goat. The greatest of all time goat.

In fact, it's a picture of two goats. Do we have two? We have two goats. You've got two goats. The first one was in the previous chapter. Chapter 15. And what we have is we have two goats.

They look cute. They have to be without blemish. And the idea is that you kill one. You kill one. And basically that one is then splattered all over to cleanse.

To cleanse the temple. And then what you have is this. That the high priest at that point will have made a sacrifice of a bull. Would have done the same.

Then he sacrifices the goat. The bull is for his own sins. The goat is for the sins of the people. And then we end up with this picture. It's a bit like a John Wick movie. Or some sort of Rambo if you're a bit older.

[14:03] Throughout the movie, just blood splattered everywhere. It's shocking. That was last week's sermon, by the way. If you want to hear it, Aaron preached. It was great. So the picture is that last week you've got blood splattered everywhere.

This week we see the second goat. Ah. And what happens to this pure, perfect second goat? Well, the priest takes his hands and lays his hands on the goat.

And in a way, symbolically, transfers all the sins of the whole people. Not only the ones that they've already given sacrifices for.

But these are even unintended, unintentional. Every single sin is placed on the goat. And then that goat is taken away. And taken away to a place that you won't ever see it again.

It's a picture of escape goat. The goat goes free and away. Takes away the sin. As one is killed, one is set free.

[15:04] It's this picture of this balance between the God of judgment and the God of freedom. The God of mercy and the God of justice.

And we see them all meeting in the same place. It's a bit like this goat is a garbage truck. And it goes and takes away sin.

Once for all. And so clean, pure, holy, spotless, washed. Aaron, the priest, he's washed once by this time.

He's put on new linen. Okay, he's taken off his priestly garments. Put on linen for this one occasion.

And this, once a year, special event. The seventh month of the seventh day of the month.

You shall afflict yourself. It can also mean you will fast. And it means you will do no work. And no stranger in your community will do any work either.

[16:01] The whole community gathers for this one special day. Look at verse 34. It says this. And this shall be a statute forever for you. That atonement may be made for the peoples of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.

And Aaron did as the Lord commanded Moses. We see judgment and mercy in this day of atonement. That point at which a holy God meets an unholy people.

Death and life is represented there. And you think that's it. All sorted. The problem is no. No. What's wrong with this picture?

What's wrong with this picture is that a goat can't really take away your sins. What's wrong with this picture is that in reality this has to be done time and time and time again. It has to be done every year.

Because if you're like me, you know that each and every day there are more sins just waiting around the corner for you to commit. Rebellion follows. Rebellion follows.

[17:04] And so the challenge is this. Is how do we do this? We need a greater goat. And that's where we see Jesus come in.

Again, if you read the Old Testament, if you get a chance to flick to Isaiah, the beginning of Isaiah, it says this. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord.

Uh-oh. What's God going to say about these sacrifices? I've had enough of burnt offerings of ram and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or lambs or goats.

You get to the point in Isaiah when you realise that all this Old Testament sacrificial system, whereby all this symbolically the sin has been placed on the goats, that symbolically it's been placed on all these animals that you've sacrificed, it doesn't mean a thing to God.

Because you're not living any differently and distinctly as a holy people. And so, verse 12 in Isaiah, it says, Verse 16 in Isaiah says this, Wash yourselves, make yourselves cleave, remove the evil of your deeds before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

[18:32] And even by the end of Isaiah, Isaiah 66, actually even the act of bringing sacrifices not only is rejected by God, it becomes an abomination.

And so you get to the end of the Old Testament and you go, we need a greater sacrifice. We need a greater goat. It's like skincare routines.

Have you seen them? I walked past one the other day. Skincare routine that promise, they basically promise anti-aging. And I'm there kind of going, okay, it's lovely that it says this is anti-aging, but I've yet to find a skin cream that stops you from aging.

It might stop you from a few wrinkles, but the reality, it's the same. These animal sacrifices never really take away your sin. We have to look to the greater goat.

And that's what's needed. Every sin, every transgression, every iniquity needs to be paid for. In order for God to remain holy and for us to be cleansed, that's when we see Christ dying for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[19:48] 1 Peter, chapter 3, 18. You see, Christ has done what the goats could never do, what the priests could never do, what the prophets never did, what the kings never did.

Christ has come. He is the greatest of all time. So let's turn to Hebrews chapter 9. Let's have a little look at Hebrews chapter 9, verse 1 to 7.

And kind of recaps all that we've looked at in the tabernacle, that idea of this big tent with different sections as you get to the Holy of Holies, which is the place that only the high priest could go once a year.

At the beginning of the story, do you remember that Aaron's sons were killed because they dishonoured God and the strict rules about who could enter? We don't enter into God's presence on our own terms and decide what we want to do.

Actually, very the opposite. God tells us how we are able to come to him. And so in Hebrews, let's have a little look. We see verse 11 about this greater tent.

[20 : 51] Do you see that? This greater, when Christ appears, we get a greater tent. That's so much better than the tabernacle that once existed.

We get a greater sacrifice. Do you see that in verse 9? In verse 9, we see a greater sacrifice. And even by the time we get to verse 13, a greater boar and goat, a greater blood than verse 12 secures an eternal redemption.

And so can you see, by the time we get to history, what we're doing is we're taking all that that didn't really work in the first place, and we're replacing it with a greater tent. We're replacing it with a greater sacrifice.

We're replacing it with a greater blood. And whose blood is that? Of course, that's Jesus' blood. And he gives us a new covenant and eternal hope.

So let me ask you these questions again. How does this passage help you to answer the question, how can a good God allow such evil? And the answer is, God doesn't allow evil.

[22 : 00] He punishes justly, righteously. The judgment falls on the Lamb. But at the same time, we get heaped on us.

This opportunity for mercy and grace and freedom. This scapegoat. That's the picture that we have with Jesus. God's wrath and mercy meet on the cross.

How can a just God allow murderers to go free? I want to suggest to you that there's several images in the Bible that show us the atonement in different ways. Who is the man who was a murderer who got free?

Do you remember Barabbas? Jesus and Barabbas? Two of them. One was judged unjustly, killed, blood, spilt, Jesus.

And Barabbas went free. It's a picture of this substitution, this sacrifice. And then maybe even in the Old Testament, again, that picture of Isaac.

[23 : 01] Just as his father's about to kill him. How does he get saved? By the ram in the thickets. Can you see again the substitution that time and time and time again happens in the Bible?

God has been preparing us. God has been progressively revealing to us where he was going. Which is going to his son, the greatest of all time. The one who would be slain.

And so, how can an unholy me approach a holy God? The answer is because of Jesus. Not because of anything else.

Not because of anything I could do. Sacrifices and offerings. I could go to church. I could pray harder. I could do this. I could do that. The whole of the Old Testament shows you. We cannot live up to our own expectations.

We are failures. We need Jesus. And that's what the Old Testament teaches us. He has paid our debt.

[24 : 03] His death is our death. And so, his freedom is then our freedom. Mark 10, 45 says this. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

It's a challenge. That we can be free and live in freedom. Live in confidence. So, as people approach you and say, you're a Christian, yet you do things wrong.

You can go, I know. That's why Jesus died. I repent. And I come back to God and ask for his forgiveness. His spirit's at work in me now. But I'm a work in progress.

Jesus is the one you really should be looking at. Because he is the perfect lamb. Blaise Pascal said this. There are two kind of people in life. The righteous who think they're sinners and the sinners who think they're righteous.

Let me say that again. There are two kind of people in life. The righteous who think they're sinners. They are the Christians. Who know that they're sinners. But they are right with God because of the goat that was slain for them.

[25 : 20] Or there are the sinners who think they are righteous. And they are those that you may meet who are not Christians. Who think they're good enough for God. But maybe they're still offering sacrifices.

Maybe they're still doing things for God. But this day of atonement tells us there's nothing that we can do that restore that relationship with God. This holy God.

Jesus is the goat of goats. The greatest of all time. So be free. Be grateful. Be amazed at the sacrifice. But also be generous with this great news.

May we go from here to encourage others to know Jesus and all that he's done for us. This wonderful day of atonement. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you.

We thank you how this day changes every other day. It changes how we see ourselves. That we are righteous.

[26 : 25] But we know that we're sinners. Thank you that we're clothed and sprinkled and covered over with the blood of the Lamb. And help us to live in the freedom and the knowledge that we are transformed and trained by your Holy Spirit.

Because of what Jesus Christ has done. And not because of anything that we have done. Send us out from here with a spring in our step. Knowing this freedom and joy.

And sharing it with others. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.