

## A Blood Atonement

Leviticus 4:1-35, 5:1-13, 6:24-30

I asked the question last week, “How can a sinful man come to have peace with a holy God?” That question could be framed, “How can a sinful man become reconciled to God?” And the clear answer is found in,

Romans 5:1 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Justification means reconciliation. And the call to reconciliation is the evangelistic call of the gospel, according to,

2 Cor. 5:20 “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

That reconciliation was represented by the peace offering which we studied last week. And what a glorious peace it is! Peace with God.

This afternoon our subject is the ground upon which that peace is obtained! The question is, how can a God, one of whose attributes is perfect justice, reconcile himself to a sinful creature? On what basis is that reconciliation accomplished? How can God so completely reconcile himself to a rebellious enemy that he would then call that enemy a “son”?

Specifically, if reconciliation is to be granted, how can the demands of justice be met? How can the penalties and curses of the law be imposed by God, while he at the same time grants forgiveness to the lawbreakers? How is it that a sinner can be sentenced to death for his sins, only then to be redeemed from that sentence?

This is only one possible answer. There had to be a substitute. A substitute who would die in the place of the sinner. The theological wording is a vicarious atonement. Vicarious means that someone acts in my place, acting for me, on my behalf. Atonement means that my sins are covered, that reconciliation is achieved.

That’s what we have in the final two sacrifices identified at the beginning of the book of Leviticus. Descriptions of a vicarious atonement. The demands of perfect justice are carried out fully and completely. By the shedding of blood.

Heb. 9:22 “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

These last two sacrifices are different from the first three. The first three were of a sweet aroma. God took great pleasure and experienced delighted satisfaction in them. Not so with the last two. With these, there was no pleasure.

To explain that, we are given a keen insight into the mind of God in,

Ezekiel 33:11 “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’”

Similarly,

Ezekiel 18:23 “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?...32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!”

To make the same point in a positive manner, we read in, Luke 15:10 “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

So, there is no joy in heaven when justice is executed, no joy when a sinner is condemned for his sin. God is glorified, to be sure, but has no pleasure. That is the key to understanding the nature of this sacrifice. God has prescribed it. God has required it. It brings him glory. But it doesn't have a sweet aroma.

The emphasis of the sacrifice is death. Not the consecration or devotion of the worshipper, like the burnt offerings and the cereal offerings. Not the communion and fellowship between God and man represented by the peace offering. Here, the emphasis is upon sin. And the wages of sin, death.

Andrew Bonar makes a great point in explaining this sacrifice. He compares these chapters of Leviticus to John's statement in, 1 John 2:1 “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.”

That's the purpose of the first three sacrifices. To encourage you in your devotion to God, even as you behold Christ in each of those sacrifices. So that you may not sin. But not these last two sacrifices, which are referred to the second half of that verse in,

1 John 2:1b “[But] if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The previous three offerings showed our acceptance and reconciliation with God. These last two show forth how our sins are actually dealt with. That's why we see emphasized,

## **I. THE NECESSITY OF BLOOD.**

This was a blood sacrifice, with the specific animal chosen depending upon both the significance of the one offering the sacrifice and his own ability and means to provide the animal. For the sins of a priest himself, the animal had to be a bull, verse 3. Same for the sins of the whole congregation, verse 13. A ruler of the people had to bring a kid of the goats, according to verse 23, and one of the common people likewise. Chapter 5 continues with the provisions for those unable to bring a lamb or a kid.

5:7 “If he is not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD, for his trespass which he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons: one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering.”

And provision was even made for a man unable to bring any animal,

5:11 “But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it, nor shall he put frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering.”

But that exception, given as a testimony of grace, doesn't eliminate the overall principle. Blood was necessary for an atonement. Because the,

### **A. Life is in the blood.**

The shedding of blood meant the sacrifice of life. And the atoning sacrifice of the this sin offering was just such a sacrifice. Instead of the sinner dying as the just consequences of his own sin, he brings an animal to die in his place.

Chapter 4 describes those four situations in repetitive detail, the offering for the priest himself, for the congregation as a whole,

for the ruler of the people, and for one of the common people. I'll refer just to the first example,

v.1-3

The bull had to die.

v.4

His blood had to be shed.

v.5

Notice in that the reference to an "unintentional" sin. Here we see the particular sinfulness of sin. The reference is not to a so-called sin of omission, or failing to do something we should have done. But rather sin that we don't even recognize as sin. Something we don't perceive as sin, for whatever reason.

Among other things included in that is the realization that we have a sin nature. We are prone to sin. And even as redeemed creatures, the remnants of that old man are still present. There is, even in the regenerated heart, the presence of sin. Sin is not limited to those outward external things that you say or do, but sin is a matter of your heart. It is a matter of your soul, your innermost being.

So when you confess your sins, and when you seek atonement for your sins, you must also seek atonement for your sinfulness! Do you see the point I'm trying to make?

One difference between these last two types of offenses are that this sin offering is broader. The trespass offering refers to specific trespasses. Specific sinful acts, which themselves also require restitution. But the broader picture is my need, your need, for the heart to be cleansed. Because the trespasses of my life, the specific acts of sin, come from my heart! So I need

atonement not only because of my sinful words and actions, but because they came from a sinful heart.

In this context, unintentional sins.

And I need atonement because of what I mentioned before. The necessity for,

### **B. The satisfaction of justice.**

And that is what is happening in this sacrifice.

There is a big New Testament word for that, propitiation. I read earlier 1 John 2:1. Now, verse 2.

1 John 2:2 "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

Not only is Jesus our advocate, our defense lawyer, but when we are convicted, he goes to jail for us!

This is, perhaps, the aspect of Christ's work that we are the most familiar with. There is repeated emphasis of it in the New Testament. For example, immediately after the reference to reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5, we are,

2 Cor. 5:21 "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Also,

Gal. 3:13 "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")

He was cursed, condemned, by the unmerciful justice of God.

So severe was that justice, that in becoming sin for us, Jesus was compelled to cry out,

Ps. 22:1 “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.”

That wasn't the end of that great psalm, nor the end of Jesus' experiences on the cross, but for those three dark hours of hell upon the cross, the awful curse of condemnation was poured out fully and completely upon him.

Justice was satisfied. Salvation accomplished.

That is marvelously pictured for us in this sin offering of Leviticus 4. The animal was killed in place of the sinner. And the blood was brought to the tabernacle of meeting. And then what? Look at the details.

v.5-7

What a sermon that was, the voice of atonement heard ascending from the blood. The ransom is given, the atonement secured. By the shedding of blood.

Surely the fullness of blood there represents the completeness of death, sprinkled seven times, representing fullness and completion. So notice,

## **II. THE SPRINKLED BLOOD.**

Where was the blood sprinkled?

“In front of the veil of the sanctuary.”

And what was the veil? It was the covering, that separated

the main temple area, the holy place, from that inner sanctuary, often called the holy of holies. Inside it was the mercy seat, the ark of the covenant, and the very presence of God himself. Only one priest, the high priest, could go inside the veil, and only once a year. We'll study about that day of atonement in Leviticus 16. But here, note the blood sprinkled upon that veil. With that visual symbol, we see that,

### **A. Blood marks the entrance into God's presence.**

The veil was that entrance to God's presence. And the sprinkled blood showed forth the only way in which any man is allowed to enter. That why very traditional churches even have red doors, signifying the blood as the entrance into God's presence.

Let me complete this illustration for you. We are told in the New Testament that that veil is Christ. And that in Christ, that veil is torn down so that we now can enter God's presence freely and boldly.

Turn with me to,

Heb. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

What glorious invitation! Draw near to God in full assurance of faith. Because the flesh of Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, is the veil. And with thoughts of that Old Testament tabernacle in your mind, let me remind you what happened at the very end of Jesus' earthly life,

Luke 23:44 “Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

The veil was torn in two. The barrier between God and man was removed. And if that veil was represented by the body of Jesus upon the cross, then it was torn down by the shedding of his blood!

And so as we enter the presence of God, we enter, as it were, through the blood stained veil, the curtain with the sprinkled blood upon it, the sprinkled blood of Jesus.

Turn back with me to,

Heb. 9:8 “The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

So the sprinkled blood of the sin offering is clearly a picture of the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from our sins and sinfulness. And that same...

### **B. Blood identifies God’s people.**

That same blood, in the symbolic sprinkling of the sin offering, fulfilled in Christ’s own flesh, is what sprinkles our hearts sprinkled and makes them clean! “With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

So it is that we enter God’s presence as those who are marked! Those who are identified. By the blood of Jesus. According to Hebrews 10:10, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

So back to Leviticus.

v.6

And, v.17

That sprinkled blood is the propitiation for your sins, you who trust in Jesus. And if the wrath of God was thus poured out upon Jesus, then the promise for you is that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Then we come to,

### **III. THE DRINKING OF BLOOD.**

Or, for that matter, the eating of the flesh of the animal. Put simply, it couldn’t be done. The blood was holy. Anything with the blood was devoted to God, and God alone. Anything that touched the blood was rendered holy, consecrated to God. It could not be touched.

6:24-30

The sin offering was not to be eaten. It was all burned and given to God, made necessary because of the completeness of our sin. All of the sin offering was required to atone for our sin, and the victim, the sacrificial animal, is made to be that sin, wholly and completely.

**A. No man is able to participate in the sin offering.**

The sacrifice is wholly consumed. Nothing less would satisfy the holy justice of the Lord of glory.

Let me point out another significant detail. Turn to chapter 4 verse 8. Here, a portion of the animal is burned at the altar of the burnt offering. It is repeated four times, for each of the types of offerings I mentioned before. Look at,  
v.8-10

Those are the same provisions as for the peace offering, showing forth the reality of the peace between God and man that the sin-offering establishes. But notice what happens to the rest of the animal.

v.11-12

The animal carcasses were taken outside the camp to be burned, every last bit of it! Why?

First, it certainly magnifies the inability of the priests to participate in the sin offering, to eat any of it, for the priest couldn't leave the tabernacle without becoming himself unclean, bringing upon himself the need to again become ceremonially cleansed. If he were to go outside the camp, he would be excluded from the holy fellowship of his priestly duties.

But more than that. The punishment of sin is so highly elevated and magnified here, that the animal couldn't even be

burned near to the presence of God. The animal carcass, already dead, had to be taken away, separated from God, and thoroughly destroyed by the most visually effective means possible. Fire.

There is no greater way to show forth the horrible punishment inflicted upon the animal substituting for the guilty sinner. There is no greater way to communicate the reproach that fell upon this victim. No greater indignity could be heaped upon him.

The body was burned outside the gate, away from the presence of God, calculated to be about 4 miles away.

Andrew Bonar makes this marvellous observation. "At this part of the ceremonies, there was meant to be exhibited a type of hell. This burning afar off, away from the Holy Place, yet seen by the whole congregation, was a terrible glance at that truth-- "He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever."

Bonar continues: "Therefore, the priest and everyone present would go home with an awful conviction of the heinousness even of forgiven sin...We are not to forget sin, because it had been atoned for; and we are not to think lightly of sin, because it is washed away."

And so as we study this horrible reproach laid upon this animal of the sin offering, realize what it took to atone for your sins. The cost that had to be paid. Let it be personal. And think about your own sin. The awful price that was paid.

And of course, don't look to a bull whose carcass was burned outside the camp. Look to Jesus. Turn with me to,

Heb. 13:10 “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”

Jesus suffered outside the gate! Quite literally, Golgatha was outside Jerusalem. Jesus bore the full weight of this sin offering, the full reproach and condemnation of his father that I described earlier. All because of our sins.

And when you consider the sin offering, that which Jesus offered in his own body, consider the horrors of hell that he experienced. He was driven from the mercy-seat and beyond the bounds of the holy city. Forsaken by his father, an outcast, a spectacle to all who passed by. Here it was, on the cross, that he descended into hell. He suffered outside the gate.

But then notice how the New Covenant goes beyond anything in the Old. Notice where all these descriptions of animal sacrifices in Leviticus 4 lead us.

Heb. 13:13 “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Let us go to Jesus. Let us cling to Jesus. Let us claim the work of Jesus Christ as the grounds upon which we sinners can find peace with a holy and righteous God!

In doing so, we are to bear his reproach. That is, we associate ourselves with his shame. Because in his shame, he suffered “that He might sanctify the people with His own blood.”

He suffered outside the gate, he endured hell, to set us apart as his people, to redeem us from our sins. And we have an absolutely astounding privilege. Unlike the priests of the Old Covenant who couldn't eat or drink any part of the sin offering, we, as the priests of the New Covenant, can!

Jesus is the sin offering, in his flesh, with the shedding of his blood, and,

### **B. Christians are invited to eat and drink of Christ.**

We can go outside the camp, and partake of our sin offering. Not literally, of course, but figuratively. Spiritually.

Turn with me to,

John 6:53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 “For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 “This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

I hope you can keep up with me in this. Not only do we have a propitiation for our sins, not only was God's justice fully poured out upon his son, but we enjoy the privilege of partaking of Christ's sacrifice. We have communion with him. And not only can we eat his flesh, but we can even drink his blood, violating the most severe of the Old Testament prohibitions. As one commentator puts it, “We enjoy the full measure of benefit which his sacrifice was designed to secure. We are allowed to feed freely

upon the highest and holiest of all sacrifices. Our reconciliation with God is complete, our fellowship with him intimate and delightful.”

And we are given a perpetual sign and seal of that glorious truth, every time we partake of the Lord’s Supper. We eat and drink, with outward and visible elements, symbolizing that we come to Jesus in faith, trusting in his atoning sacrifice for the propitiation of our sins. We eat and drink of the very elements Jesus has set aside for that New Covenant sacrament, declaring, “This is my body which is given for you,” and “this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

I wish to say two things as a final conclusion to this study of the sin offering. First, recognize the heinousness of your sin, measured by the excruciating suffering our Lord endured because of it. Consider deeply and fully and continually how deep an offense that sin is against a God who has loved you as a Father since he chose you to be adopted as his sons before the foundation of the world.

Take sin seriously. And learn to hate it. Hate it with the same hatred that caused God to condemn it so severely.

And then, secondly, flee to Jesus.

“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

In other words, as you consider the depth of your own sin, worship Jesus who is your sin offering. David puts it this way in,

Psalm 51:15 “O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The

sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.”

As Hebrews 13 continues, “by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”