

Blended Week 7

February 8: Leviticus 4-6 and Matthew 25:1-30

We read about the requirements for a sin offering. Sins committed unintentionally must still be accounted for even though the individual did not mean to. The result of the sin is still there and must be atoned for. Sin is serious business whether we meant to engage in the sinful activity or not. The text refers to the “anointed priest” indicating the high priest. The sin offering varied based on the degrees of responsibility for the one that committed the sin. The high priest would have to provide an unblemished young bull when he sinned. The collective congregation required a young bull for theirs. A leader in the community had to bring an unblemished male goat. A common person had to provide an unblemished female goat.

The text gives us explanations on when sin offerings are required. If a person swindles his neighbor, he has to make it right with the neighbor, but still must make a sacrifice for the sin.

God also explains how Aaron and his sons are to handle these offerings. The burnt offering’s ashes must be taken outside of the camp. For the grain offering, the priest is to remove a handful of the fine flour and olive oil and burn it on the altar. The sin offering has to be slaughtered before The LORD in a holy place.

In our New Testament reading, Jesus continues to warn about remaining vigilant for His return. He tells the parable of the ten virgins that are waiting outside for the bridegroom. Five of them brought all the oil they needed, the other five were foolish and figured they would get it when they needed it. The groom was delayed and showed up in the middle of the night. ALL the women were sleeping when he arrived. Only the five that had enough oil were allowed into the banquet. The other five had to go back into town to find someone to sell them the oil. By the time they made it back, it was too late. I have known people in my life that knew they needed The LORD. They knew that He was the way, but they were intent on not making Him Lord of their lives until they were close to death. The idea was that they wanted to have as much fun as possible and then at the last minute make a deathbed confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. To a degree, this parable teaches against that mentality. We do not know when we are going to draw our last breath. If we know that Jesus is Lord, better to confess Him now and be ready than to wait until later. If you are feeling called to follow Christ, there is no time like the present!

Jesus also teaches the parable of the talents. In this case, they are dealing with money. One servant receives five talents, the second servant receives two, and the third receives one. The first two talents put the money to work and double the investment. The third one hides his talent. When it comes time to present the talents back to the master, he is furious with the one that did nothing with what he was given. God has given us talents and other abilities. We should use these the way God intended us to use them.

February 9: Leviticus 7-9 and Matthew 25:31-46

Moses is given instruction on how to handle the restitution offering and fellowship sacrifice. The restitution offering was especially holy. In this instruction, God also explains that they are

not to eat any fat or anything with blood in it. We also read about the ordination service for Aaron and his sons. I am glad they have changed the process since then! There was a lot of blood involved again. After they were done with the sacrifices, the newly ordained people were not allowed to leave the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days. The number seven symbolized completion for the process. These men dared not to go against God's commands and leave before the seven days were up. They are to set the example of obedience for everyone else. Since they are examples for the people, they will have a special accountability as religious leaders. Woe to them that would lead someone astray from God Almighty.

In the Matthew reading, Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and goats. They are divided up. The sheep go to the right and the goats go to the left. The sheep are told by the King to inherit the kingdom prepared for them. They ask why and they are told that when He was hungry, they fed Him. When He was in prison, they visited Him. He was given water by them when He was thirsty. Even though they were not serving Him directly, they were still serving Him. This is a call to action to take care of people. As believers, we should feel the need to help where we can.

I know that some folks do not like to give because they do not necessarily trust what the receiving person is going to do. One thing is for sure, we won't be held accountable for their behavior. We will be held accountable for ours. Sometimes we might help someone that didn't really need it. Other times, the help will go to someone who genuinely needs it.

I think this is an "Andy Wood original" parable. I call it "The Birds and the Squirrels". I love to watch birds. We have some nice windows in the back of my house with a lovely maple tree behind our patio. During the summer, I get a lot of birds at my feeders. I even have a nice set of binoculars to watch them. We get cardinals, blue jays, woodpeckers, chickadees, hummingbirds, and all kinds of other winged creatures hanging out in the back yard through the summer. Unfortunately, we also get squirrels. The seed isn't there for them, but they are constantly getting into the feeders, taking seed that was intended for the birds. I have two options. I can either let the squirrels get in the seed and take it. Or I can take the bird feeders away. If I take the feeders away, the squirrels will go away, but the birds will go away as well. Why remove the birds to get rid of the squirrels? So, I will continue to feed the birds through the year. No sense in taking away their benefit because of the squirrels.

February 10: Leviticus 10-12 and Matthew 26:1-19

Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, decide that they are going to do their own thing. They took their fireman, put fire in it, put incense in it, and made unauthorized fire. As a result, they were struck down by The LORD. This should serve as a warning to folks in ministry. These two probably thought they could do whatever they wanted because they were anointed and set apart from the rest of the Israelites. Rather than understand the gravity of their position and acting accordingly, they figured it allowed them to make up their own rules. Their disobedience cost them their lives.

God defines what animals are clean and unclean. He gives very detailed instructions to identify what can and cannot be eaten. These rules do not apply to Christians today, but we can see God's purpose for them when He first established them. If we look at the Levitical instructions

from a medical standpoint, it makes sense. The animals that are deemed "unclean" were not as sanitary as the ones deemed "clean". Pigs in those days would wallow in filth. If they were not prepared properly, it could make the person sick. The scaleless fish and the shrimp and lobsters are all bottom feeders. They are eating all the garbage on the bottom of the sea floor. It would make sense that they were told not to eat these types of animals.

In the Matthew reading, Jesus has made the religious elite so mad that they decide to devise a plan to kill Him. Meanwhile, Jesus is in Bethany. A woman approaches Him with very expensive oil. The oil in this jar was worth about one year's wages. She takes the year worth of wages and anoints The LORD with it. Some look at this like an act of reverent worship because it is! However, there is one in the midst that wants to complain about the waste. He complains saying that they could have sold the oil and given to the poor. I was not there, but I have the feeling that what this disciple was trying to do was make it look like he cared about the poor. He wanted to say that he cared, but when it came to actually doing the work of helping, he would not. Instead, this particular disciple will join the plot with the chief priests to kill Christ.

My hope and prayer as we walk through this world, that we back our words up with action. "Facta non verba".

February 11: Leviticus 13 and Matthew 26:20-54

The text breaks down a variety of skin diseases and what to do in the event that someone has one. They are given ways to determine whether the disease is serious enough for them to be permanently cut off from the rest of the people or not. This seems harsh from our perspective, but we must remember that they did not have hospitals back then. The intent of the Levitical Law was to show the other nations how a holy and set apart people behave and follow the One True God. However, the secondary point of the Law was to preserve the people.

In our New Testament reading we read about the first Lord's Supper. Jesus knows the hour is at hand, He tells the disciples that one of them will betray Him. Each of them were distressed when they heard that one would betray Him. Each of them are concerned that they are the one that will betray. It seems like a small nuance, but the first 11 disciples refer to Christ as Lord. Judas, the one that will betray Him, addressed Jesus as Rabbi. After the dinner, Jesus tells them that they will all run away because of Him. They all deny that they could ever run from Him. However, we will see that they all will disperse as the events around Christ's crucifixion unfold.

Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He asks for Peter, James, and John to go further into the garden to pray. They are asked to remain vigilant while Jesus is praying. When He comes back, He sees that the three have fallen asleep. These three men that were adamant about standing firm in their faith in Jesus, could not even keep watch for an hour.

Judas arrives with a mob and hands Jesus over to them. Jesus could have brought down 12 legions of angels to sweep away His enemies, but He does not. The cross was part of the Father's plan and Jesus was not going to deviate from it.

February 12: Leviticus 14 and Matthew 26:55-75

We read the instructions for cleansing of skin diseases. When the people are cleaned, they are to make an offering to The LORD. We notice that what is offered depends on the wealth of the victim. Poor people do not have to give like the richer folks do. In both cases, though, the person is required to give something. We also read instructions about what to do with mildew outbreaks in homes. If the mildew does not spread after they scrape the inside out, then the house can remain upright. If it spreads, though, then the entire thing has to be torn down and taken outside of the city.

In the New Testament reading Jesus is brought before Caiaphas, the high priest. They question Him about His statement that He could demolish God's sanctuary and rebuild it in three days. Jesus remains silent to that question. When the high priest demands that Jesus tell them if He is the Messiah, Jesus simply replies, "You have said it." With this, the high priest tears his clothes and asks what more they need to condemn Him for blasphemy. What amazes me about this group of men is that they knew the Scriptures. They knew the prophecies and they knew that Jesus had fulfilled these prophecies. They were so blinded to what they wanted the Messiah to be, they completely missed Him.

While He is there, Peter is watching from afar. Someone recognizes him as being with Jesus, he denies knowing Christ. Another person recognizes him. He denies one more time. He is confronted a third time and this time Peter swears an oath that he does not know Jesus. The rooster crows and Peter is reminded that Jesus told him he would betray Him three times before the rooster crowed.

February 13: Leviticus 15-17 and Matthew 27: 1-31

They are given instructions for the day of atonement. Aaron is given specific instructions on how to enter the most holy place to make this offering. He brings one bull and two goats. The bull is sacrificed to atone for Aaron and his family's sin. The goat chosen for sacrifice is decided by casting lots. One will be released and the other will be sacrificed to atone for the sin of the people.

The goat that is released is sent into the wilderness for azazel. This word only occurs in chapter 16. There are three mainline interpretations as to what azazel is. The first view has it translated as "the one carrying away evil". This interpretation is where we derive the modern term "scapegoat". The second view is that azazel means "a rough and difficult place". The third view is that azazel is actually Azazel. Legend identifies Azazel as the leader of the fallen angels. The first view is the widely accepted view for interpreting this mysterious word.

God also identifies forbidden sacrifices. The people must bring their sacrifice to the entrance of the tent of meeting. This direction makes sense given the fact that the people had a propensity for worshipping other gods. By bringing the sacrifice to the entrance of the tent of meeting, no one can confuse who the animal is being sacrificed to.

Our reading in the New Testament deals with Jesus being turned over to Pilate. Judas realizes what he has done. He confesses his sin to the chief priests. The chief priests ask him what his

sin is to them. They got what they needed out of Judas and now they don't care about his remorse. Beware people that will lead you to sin for their benefit.

Pilate asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews. Jesus simply responds, "You have said it." After that, He remains silent. Pilate's wife warns him about Jesus. She says that she has been tormented by dreams about Christ.

The crowd is asked whether they would like Barabbas or Jesus freed. The crowd cries out for Barabbas to be freed. Pilate washes his hands from the situation, stating that the blood of Christ is not on his hands. The people proclaim that Christ's blood is on their hands and their childrens' hands. Unfortunately, over time, this piece of Scripture was used to justify being antisemitic. That notion is false. The fact of the matter is that the blood of Jesus is on the hands of all sinners. Christ died to atone for everyone's sins. He died for you and me. Since that is the case, His blood is on all of our hands.

February 14: Leviticus 18-19 and Matthew 27:32-66

The people are warned against pagan practices. As we read through Leviticus 18, we see a variety of sexual sins that are deemed as pagan practices. Humans tend to have three besetting sins; greed, anger, or sex. Many of the pagan practices of the time dealt with sex. The Israelites are forbidden from engaging in these practices. God is going to give the Promised Land over to them. The people that they will displace are being driven out of the land because of the pagan practices they routinely engage in.

God also gives laws of holiness. When they plant a field, they are not to strip it bare. Instead, they are to leave some for the poor to glean. They are warned not to be prejudicial against poor people when deciding cases. They are to be fair. They are told not to harbor hatred against their neighbors. Instead, they are to love them. These commands are just as important today as they were when God first gave them to His people. Are we keeping them?

In the Matthew reading, we read about Christ's death. He is crucified between two criminals. We have a tendency to think that Christ was crucified far away from the crowd. However, that is not the case. The crowd would have been up close to Jesus as He hung from the cross. So He could look in their eyes as they were hurling their insults at Him. Christ's charges were put in writing above His head. The charges were not really charges, they were an admission: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews". Jesus draws His last breath and is placed in a tomb purchased by Joseph of Arimathea. The tomb will not be used very long...

February 15: Leviticus 20-21 and Matthew 28

The LORD tells Moses to prohibit worship of Molech. Infant sacrifice was one of the tenets of worshiping Molech. The Israelites are not to offer their children to Molech. The Israelites are not to turn to mediums or diviners. God is their source of knowledge and protection. God also gives another warning against pagan sexual practices.

The people are to keep all of The LORD's statutes and ordinances. They are to be holy and set apart. They are to be holy, just as the LORD is holy.

Any of Aaron's sons that have physical defects are forbidden from coming near to present the food of his God. However, this does not mean that these men are cut off from doing priestly duties. In fact, they are allowed to eat the food, they simply cannot present it. This demonstrates God's demand for perfection. God is holy and perfect.

The only way that we can become holy and perfect is to repent and confess Christ as Lord. In the Matthew chapter, we see that Christ holds the victory over death. The women were coming to anoint Him in His tomb, but when they arrived, they found that He was not there. Death could not hold Jesus. Since we are His, death does not hold victory over us either. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. His blood not only covers our sins, but it wipes it completely away, like it never even happened. Praise God Almighty that sent His only begotten Son to free us from our sins and the grip of death!