

Good Friday – “The Final Sacrifice”

It’s funny that one of the more important books in the Bible is one of the most neglected books of the Bible. If you were to guess which one I’m speaking of, you would probably say _____.

The book of Leviticus lays out for us the way to approach God. That’s significant! The book of Exodus ended with Moses completing the construction of the tabernacle – the very place God provided to meet with Him. But it also ended with Moses unable to enter in. Therein lies the problem.

God created us to be in close fellowship with Him. Right from the beginning in the Garden of Eden God created man to know God and be in close communion with Him. It’s what Adam and Eve enjoyed until they chose to disobey God and sin entered into the human race. That open way of fellowship with God now needed to be repaired, which is what the Bible sets out to reveal ultimately. But as we look at what God was preparing, we see some wonderful patterns and pictures that would all be fulfilled in Christ.

So getting back to Moses unable to enter the tabernacle. It’s interesting that Moses was called up to the Mountain of God when given the instructions for the tabernacle. He followed these instructions precisely. And yet, when it was completed he was not able to enter in.

This mountain of God imagery is a very interesting one.

Psalm 15:1–2, *"Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? ² He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;"*

Psalm 24:3–4, *"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully."*

You see, God is seen as above man. And our coming to Him must be done on His standards.

Interestingly, some have proposed that the Garden of Eden was the prototype temple of God and it too is a mountain. Though this passage is depicting the fall of Lucifer, the garden of Eden is referred to as a mountain.

Ezekiel 28:13–14, *"You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper,*

Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. ¹⁴ “You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.”

So, beginning with Adam and Eve’s fall, we see a pattern in Scripture of God leading man back into fellowship with Him. They’ve in a sense, fallen down the mountain and there’s a call to ascend to the hill of the Lord, but in order to do so, we must come on His terms.

Getting back to Leviticus, it’s interesting that Leviticus is at the center of the Pentateuch – the first 5 books of the Bible. And some have suggested these books form a bit of a chiastic structure. A chiastic structure is a familiar style of writing in the Bible where a pattern develops and then reaches its main point and moves back in reverse order. It’s a way to see and emphasize certain themes. This happens in the Pentateuch where Genesis details the nation of Israel being set apart and called to blessing. Exodus is chronicling the nation of Israel fleeing from Egypt and their wilderness wandering which brings them to Mount Sinai. Numbers is the moving away from Sinai to enter the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is again reminding them of the blessings that are theirs as they continue as a nation set apart to the Lord. Leviticus of course sits at the middle of this structure and provides the dominant theme – the tabernacle of God and the place of meeting with God.

You can look at these first 5 books of the Bible as climbing a mountain. The climb up is similar to the climb down, but in reverse. It’s the mountain top, the middle of the climb, that provides the true splendor of the journey. This is the journey this book highlights, culminating in the great view of God in His holy place (atop the mountain per se) and man entering in to enjoy His presence.

And it’s in Leviticus that the problem Moses faced at the end of Exodus is now solved. The solution is found in sacrifice. God must be approached on His terms, and He’s provided a covering, or atonement for us. That comes through sacrifice. In fact, when Adam and Eve sinned, they recognized they were naked. They tried to cover themselves with their own resources – fig leaves. But God provided animal skins – which was the first sacrifice, and it revealed the means we must have to be covered of our sins.

Why did it require a sacrifice? Because sin results in death. A sacrifice provided the substitute for the penalty of that sin. The sinner could be atoned for, or covered, by the shed blood of that sacrifice.

- This might be a hard thing to rationalize for some who think this is senseless or barbaric to do to God’s living creatures. But it reminds us of the high cost of breaking God’s laws and the damage that sin brings.

In fact, the book of Leviticus creates another chiastic structure because at the middle, or the heart of the book, which is at the middle or the heart of the Pentateuch, it details the Day of Atonement and the importance of a sacrifice (Leviticus 16-17). It’s what God has provided for His people to have fellowship with Him.

- **Leviticus 17:11**, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."*
- This word **atonement** references a covering, forgiveness, reconciliation or to purge.

So it is the blood of a sacrifice that cleanses, purifies, forgives, and reconciles us to God. But there’s a problem. These sacrifices were able to appease God, but they could never fully make us whole. Otherwise, we wouldn’t need to keep offering them.

Look at what we read in Hebrews 10

Hebrews 10:1–4, *"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."*

As much as this was part of God’s plan in the Old Testament, it could never perfect the people who approached God through sacrifice. Otherwise, they wouldn’t need to keep coming with a sacrifice. But with every passing year, and with every passing sacrifice, there was a reminder of sins. God provided a covering, but it was not complete.

This was all to point us to why we gather today. Jesus came as that perfect sacrifice to not just cover our sin, but to remove it completely. This was all completed through Christ.

Hebrews 10:5–10, *"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. ⁶ In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me— To do Your will, O God.' "* ⁸ *Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), ⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. ¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

Those words, **'once for all'** are so special. The work has been completed. Sacrifices are no longer needed, because the final sacrifice has been given. The perfect sacrifice which now not only covers us but makes us new. He provides a new and living relationship with God, where we can now come boldly to Him because the price has been paid.

- **Hebrews 10:19–22**, *"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."*
- This passage speaks of the access we have now to God through Jesus. Just as when Jesus surrendered His life on the cross sacrificially a great earthquake happened and the veil of the temple was torn in two – from top to bottom. The holy of holies was now open. Access was now available!
- This is also a reminder that we don't draw near by Christ's sinless life, we can only do so by His vicarious death. His body needed to be broken in death.
- May we be ever so grateful for the privilege of access we have and the tremendous cost it took.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, there are some wonderful patterns seen in Scripture and seen in these chiastic structures. A picture we saw earlier was of climbing a mountain. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? The reality is none of us can on

our own. But Jesus took His cross and climbed the hill for us. He did the work we couldn't do!

Another interesting connection is that on the Day of Atonement, the priest would take two goats and cast lots for them. One goat would be the Lord's and would be sacrificed as a sin offering. The high priest would take that blood into the holy of holies and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat of the Lord. He would then come out and lay his blood stained hands upon the live goat and confess the sins of the nation upon it. That goat would then be released into the wilderness. This was the scapegoat. One goat would live because of the sacrifice of the other.

This choosing of two goats, killing one and letting the other go, was played out when Pontius Pilate brought two men before the crowds. One was to be killed, and one was to be set free.

The crowds called for Barabbas to be set free. A guilty criminal, yet set free because Jesus took his place.

- Interestingly Barabbas' name according to early Syriac manuscripts was 'Jesus bar Abbas', or, Jesus, son of the father. We have two people, both Jesus, son of the father, one to be sacrificed and one to be let go.

What God was revealing at the heart of the Pentateuch – the very way to approach Him – was played out on Good Friday.

- We are all Barabbas. We were all on death row and we have been granted a pardon undeservedly. But it took the sacrifice of another. A final sacrifice. Blood was shed for our ultimate atonement.
- The sins of Israel were forgiven for that year, but through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, we are forgiven forever.
- **Hebrews 8:12**, *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*