

The Traveling Pulpit

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The Day of Atonement—A Day of Spiritual House Cleaning (Lev. 16:1-34)

4He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these *are* holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. **5**And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. **6**And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. **7**And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. **8**And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. **9**And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him *for* a sin offering. **10**But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, *and* to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. **11**And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which *is* for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which *is* for himself: **12**And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring *it* within the vail: **13**And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that *is* upon the testimony, that he die not: **14**And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle *it* with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. **15**Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that *is* for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: **21**And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: **22**And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. **23**And Aaron shall

come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy *place*, and shall leave them there: **24**And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people. **25**And the fat of the sin offering shall he burn upon the altar. **29**And *this* shall be a statute for ever unto you: *that* in the seventh month, on the tenth *day* of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, *whether it be* one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: **30**For on that day shall *the priest* make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, *that* ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.”

Introduction

When the first warm breezes of spring begin to blow, there are some people who like to do what is called an annual house cleaning. This does not mean that no cleaning takes place during the year, but it means that periodically we sense the need of a special kind of cleanup around the house. Israel practiced an annual spiritual house cleaning that came in the fall of the year. There were numerous sacrifices which dominated the life of Israel. Sacrifices were offered on a daily basis plus special sacrifices were made throughout the year. These Old Testament sacrifices simply pointed toward the work that Christ would accomplish and fulfill in the New Testament. All Old Testament sacrifices were incomplete without the observance of a special sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was when Israel practiced her spiritual house cleaning and made atonement for all the sins that went unnoticed during the year (Heb. 10:1-18).

The Day of Atonement was Israel's greatest religious holiday because it prefigured the day when Jesus would die for the sins of His people. Actually, a picture of Calvary is painted in verse thirty of this text. The TIME of Calvary was in the fullness of time on “that day.” The WORKER of Calvary is the “priest” when the veil was rent. The WORK of Calvary is reconciliation in the “atonement.” The PURPOSE of Calvary was to “cleanse” in justification. As we take a Birdseye View of our text, we discover that forgiveness of sin rests upon the shed blood. The animal blood of the Old Testament is only a type (picture) of the all sufficient blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-14). Animal blood could not remove sin, but only cover it and that's why the ritual had to be repeated annually. However, the precious blood of Jesus washes away our sin and removes its guilt and stain forever. No person is going to Heaven unless they have been washed in the blood of Calvary's “Lamb” (Jh. 1:29).

Believing in the existence of God, being thankful, sincere, baptized, good, or even a church member is not enough to get you to Heaven. In order for a sinner to benefit from the shed blood of Christ, he must do more than come to the church house, but he must come to the “mercy seat” (Lev. 16:1-3). Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1) reminds us that there is only one way to meet God. These two sons of Aaron came to meet God on their own terms and they died. Sinners will not get saved on their terms or at their convenience, but by the drawing of the Holy Spirit (Jh. 6:44). Only the high priest could officiate on the Day of Atonement. No other Levite was allowed to assist in this important ritual. Likewise, Christ alone was qualified to pay our sin debt and rent the veil (Matt. 27:51) to become our heavenly High Priest at the “right hand” of God the Father (Rom. 8:34, Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2).

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Needful Humiliation v.4

Aaron, the high priest, was required to approach the “mercy seat” with a right attitude. Man had best not approach God, thinking that God owes him a pardon. The only thing sinful man deserves is wrath and only in mercy can he know forgiveness. On the Day of Atonement the ceremonial robe of the high priest was laid aside for the plain “linen” clothing. He would not approach the “mercy seat” in the garments of glory and beauty, but in humility. The priest had to “wash” meaning that he had to be ceremonially clean. The Day of Atonement was the most solemn day in the year for the priest, just as the day of Christ's humiliation was the most solemn day in all history. It was the day when Christ laid

aside His heavenly abode to demonstrate the humility of a servant (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus Christ stepped out of the halls of heaven and lived an unspotted life in a sin cursed world (Heb. 4:15).

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Special Sacrifice v.5-11

Aaron was required to first acknowledge his own sinful condition. It was not enough for the priest to believe that the offering availed for Israel, but he had to believe it himself. Simply believing that Christ died is not sufficient for salvation. We must personally trust Him as our Substitute in paying the penalty of our sin. Because Jesus was PERFECT, He did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself. He was the Sacrifice (Heb. 7:23-28). Two goats constituted one offering in the Old Testament as those two goats represented two aspects of Christ's death (Atonement and Substitution). One went up to the altar in death and the other went away into the "wilderness" as the "scapegoat."

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Nearness to God v.12-15

Once a year, the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle or later the temple. On that day, he made three different visits into the Most Holy Place. First, he would burn "incense." Secondly, he would offer the "blood" of his own sin offering. Thirdly, he would offer the "blood" of the "sin offering" for Israel. The "burning coals" and "sweet incense" caused the fumes to hide the "mercy seat" from view. We learn from this that we must approach God as Holy Deity. That means, cautiously, reverently, and prayerfully. Today, God is so often treated very haphazardly and disrespectfully by not only the world, but by those who profess to be Christians. But, we may ask a question as we read about the approach of the priest into the Holy of Holies. Why was the "incense" taken first? I think it's because of how it symbolized praise and glory to God. Let us remember that we have sinned and come "short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus never sinned and He died to the "glory of God." The death of Christ removed the last barrier to God as He became our High Priest in Heaven. The way into the Holy of Holies was the "blood" sprinkled way and the blood alone was insufficient unless it was applied to the "mercy seat."

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Solemn Imputation v.21-25

Confession of sin can be said to be the first step in getting right with God. Confession, repentance, and faith are all wrapped up in the same bundle. Only God can break a sinner's heart and grant the ability to confess, repent, and believe. After applying the "blood" to the "mercy seat," the high priest would "confess" the sins of Israel and lay his hand on the "live goat." This symbolically transferred their guilt of sin to the "goat." The "live goat" was known as the "scapegoat" because it was taken away to the "wilderness" never to be seen again. This "goat" became a curse as it took their sins to an unknown destination. Just as no one could ever find this "goat," God has promised to forgive and forget our sin when we repent and trust Him for forgiveness (Ps. 103:12). Year after year, this was done until the death of Christ and then in Christ, our sin is not symbolically, but literally removed for all eternity. That doesn't mean that the Christian will never sin, but it's impossible for a Believer to sin without the Holy Spirit making us uncomfortable (Heb. 12:6-11). God deals with a Christian in this life through "chastisement," but when a Christian will stand before Him in Heaven, we have assurance that all our sins have been washed away.

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Real Affliction v.29a

Sin is no light matter with God. He takes it seriously and so should we. There are always tragic consequences to sinning. People who think lightly of sin will think lightly of Calvary. The price paid for our sin must be accepted with convicted and broken hearts. Spiritual matters are taken far too lightly today in Christendom. We need a fresh appreciation for Holy Spirit conviction and pray that God will move us and disturb us when we sin and stray.

The Day of Atonement was a Day of Perfect Rest v.29b

On the Day of Atonement, no one worked except the priest and his work was typical of reconciliation. Like Nadab and Abihu, man continues to try and work out his own way to Heaven which is impossible. Only the finished work of Calvary's "Lamb" (Jh. 1:36) is the only acceptable payment that satisfies the divine justice of Almighty God. The old song, Jesus Paid It All, says it well when the writer penned the words, "Jesus paid it all, All to him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He wash'd it white as snow." Every Lord's Day when we gather on Sunday with God's people, it's a reminder to us that all we can do is "rest" in the Lord Jesus because of His "finished" (Jh. 19:30) work on the cross and His glorious victory over death. The Day of Atonement was a day of self-denial. Calvary should make us willing to forfeit the pleasure of this world for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Closing

All the Old Testament believing Israelites were saved by faith as they trusted in the coming fulfillment of Christ. Faith is the only way sinners have ever been saved. The Old Testament saint was saved by looking toward the cross and the Old Testament saint is saved by looking back at the cross (Heb. 9:23-24). The precious atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only element powerful enough to make us clean before Holy God. Old Testament Israel offered daily sacrifices, but it was not enough. There had to be a DAY OF ATONEMENT. The blood of bulls and goats was not enough. There had to be the shedding of pure perfect redeeming "blood" from the Son of the Living God Who would come and purchase a people unto Himself. Church going to not enough. Paying tithes is not enough. Being good to your neighbor is not enough. Jesus said. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jh. 3:3). I'll never forget visiting and witnessing to a man in the Chapel Hill hospital many years ago who was dying. He told me that he had a son in Hell and that he wanted to die and go to Hell to be with his son. Only God can open the eyes of the spiritually blind. Only God can give you a desire for salvation. Only God can save you from the penalty of your sin because He alone stepped out of Heaven's glory, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and went to the cross to pay the sinners sin debt.

In what kind of condition is your spiritual house? Does it need cleaning? Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ can clean up the rotten mess that we've made out of our lives. One of these days, we're all going to die. If you've never trusted Christ to forgive your sins and as the One who took your sins upon His sinless self as your Substitute on the cross, then you're not ready nor prepared to die. If you've never trusted Christ by faith to cleanse your never dying soul in the blood of the "Lamb," would you do it today? The Day of Atonement was prefigured in the Old Testament, but it was fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. Salvation is in Christ alone, by faith alone, and by grace alone.

A Ministry Update

As we enter the Fall Season, I've chosen to write this month's Bible Study on a subject that was originally observed by Israel about this time of year in the Old Testament. The truth of it is applicable all twelve months of the year. May God use it to His glory. Also, my newest book that I wrote, primarily for pastors, is ready for circulation. It's ***The Sovereignty of God In A Pastor's Sufferings And Sorrows***. Anyone is welcome to read it, but I wrote it as a sequel to my pastoral autobiography, hoping to encourage pastors in the difficulties that they face. Like all my other books, there is no charge and I'll be more than happy to give a copy to anyone just for the asking. Hopefully, you'll pass it on to your pastor, trusting that God will use it to lift him up when the devil wants to kick him down. As always, "thank you" for your prayerful and financial support to this little ministry as we try to reach the world with the Word. Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM