

The Day of Atonement

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[0 : 00] So, we're gonna look at Leviticus for a little bit and then we'll pray together. So very simple and what we always do and tonight we've got Leviticus 16 before us which is the climax of the book and so there's so much here but we'll be brief, see if there's any reflections or questions or anything like that as well.

So let me pray and then we can get started. Lord, we thank You so much for bringing us together in the middle of the week as it's now getting dark earlier and earlier we remember Lord that You were the God who made the light and the darkness in Genesis 1.3.

You were the God who governs everything and so we come tonight needing the assistance, the presence, the illumination of the gift that the Holy Spirit gives to us when we read Scripture and so we ask for that with this very important chapter Lord.

We ask that Leviticus 16 would be used to change our lives even and so we ask that big prayer, that bold prayer in Jesus' name, amen. Alright, so let's look at Leviticus 16 together.

Here's a handout for you as well, all around. So I think sometimes when you read the book of Leviticus, one of the things that happens is you feel like you are walking through a forest and then you've got it maybe a little bit at the beginning but as different types of sacrifices get introduced and different types of priestly clothing get introduced and different rites, R-I-T-E, get introduced.

[1 : 43] All of a sudden the forest has become a thicket and you can no longer distinguish plants from plants, they're all kind of growing in together and you feel trapped and you don't really know what sacrifice are we looking at and what does this mean that you feel like that and so try to be as simple as possible tonight to give the clearest picture because Leviticus 16 opens up the whole book.

So we'll try to do that just for a few minutes. Here's the most important things to remember. One, Leviticus is the heart of the Pentateuch.

So the third of five books, the very center. Chapter 16 is the heart of Leviticus. And so Leviticus chapter 16 is the centerpiece of the books of Moses.

It's the very core of the five books that Moses wrote. And so that means that it's also the climax. So this is the climactic moment of the books of Moses.

What is it asking? Leviticus is simply asking you or giving you an answer, I should say, to the question, how can we who are people of dust and sinners and corrupt in a corrupt land world because of our sin enter into God's presence, both because he is holy and also because he is invisible.

[3 : 06] He's non-corporeal. He doesn't have a body. So how can we who have bodies, who are physical, who are people of dust and sinners, into enter into God's presence? That's the question that Leviticus is asking. There's a temptation when you read it to then say what it offers us in the Old Testament is religion.

The New Testament offers you gospel. Leviticus offers you religion. Salvation by works, getting into God's presence by your behaviors. And while there are religious practices all over Leviticus, RIT writes, Leviticus is fundamentally the Levitical system is a system of grace from top to bottom. It is God's gracious gift, temporary by shadow, sign and symbol for people to be able to come into his presence.

It's grace from top to bottom. And so the goal of Leviticus, and I'll move on to Leviticus 16 after this, the goal of Leviticus in one way, you can go to the Psalms and read the goal. It's all over the Psalms.

And one of the best places I think is Psalm 36 verses eight and nine. And it says, the people of God are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house, oh Lord.

[4 : 19] So what's the fatness of the house of God? It is the extra food. So fatness of the table means there's plenty of food for everybody. So firstly, it's called the people of God are delighted with all the food in your house, Lord.

And it says right after that, you give them drink from the river of your pleasure, pleasures. That's what it says in the ESV. The word in Hebrew is the word from the river of your Eden's, which has been translated here as pleasure.

So now we've moved from the fatness of the house to the garden space. And then lastly, for with you is the spring of life in your light, we see light.

So here we've got this vision that if Leviticus works, you get the fatness of the Lord's home, you get it in a garden with a river, and it's the temple all at the same time.

And so the big kind of way to see it is that if Leviticus works, if the sacrificial system works, you're in the home of the Lord, the garden of the Lord, and the temple of the Lord simultaneously, all at once.

[5 : 23] All right. So many things to remember that you got to have to really understand Leviticus 16. One, the tabernacle mimics the Garden of Eden.

All right. So the tabernacle is set up to mimic the very Garden of Eden from Genesis chapter 1 and 2. In particular, the Garden of Eden is the Holy of Holies.

And the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle is mimicking very particularly the Garden of Eden. So the closer you are to the Ark of the Covenant, the closer you are to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. That's the idea.

Remember there are cherubim on the curtains to enter the Holy place. There are cherubim on the curtains facing each other to enter the Holy of Holies. There are cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant touching their wings together.

Right. And where else do we see that same image, that same reality blocking the Garden of Eden, the guardians of the Garden of Eden. Right. So that's what you have there. And that means that from Genesis to this moment in Leviticus, you've got a series of temples that are all mimicking the Garden of Eden.

[6 : 29] The first one, Eden itself, the first temple, the second one, Noah's Ark, I think, is the second great temple in the book of Genesis. And then Mount Sinai is the climactic temple after both in Exodus 3 when Moses goes up the mountain, but also when the Israelites leave Egypt and come to the temple.

And they go down, down, down, down. They descend in exile to the golden calf. And then they come back up to the Garden of Eden. That is the Tabernacle. And that's where the rest of the Bible, the Old Testament leaves you, Tabernacle and Temple ultimately.

Okay. And so the question tonight is what is the goal of the day of atonement? So think about that with me for a few minutes. What is the goal of the day of atonement? What do you think the goal is of this right RIT, this ritual, the day of atonement?

Let's look at it. All right. It's dramatic. Leviticus 16, this RIT is drama. It is a story. It is a narrative enacted by one man, a high priest.

And people are distant, but watching, wondering what's going to happen and all. And there is, it's like watching a great film or something. And it leads all the way up to the moment that the high priest is going to open the curtain to the Holy of Holies.

[7 : 45] And the big question is, is he going to die? That's the question. That's the drama that's taking place. All right. So let's think about it for a minute. The first big movement is the high priest.

So the goal is the high priest has got to get inside the Holy of Holies where God's presence resides. But he can't.

And we read about that in verse two. So if you look down with me in verse two, the Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron your brother not to come into the holy place inside the veil.

So that's the Holy of Holies. Over the mercy seat, that's the Ark of the Covenant that is on the Ark so that he may not die because I'm going to be there. I'm going to appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

And then right after that, so preamble to this whole process, how in the world is the Holy of the High Priest going to get in? He deserves to die if he enters. And so in verse three, but this is how he's going to do it.

[8 : 42] He's going to take a bull and a ram. He's going to sacrifice them. He's going to put on verse four a linen coat and undergarments and tie the linen sash around his waist.

And then just down from there, he's going to bathe as well in a body of water. All right. So the preamble before you ever start the day of atonement right is the High Priest has to bathe first. And then he has to put on holy clothing that is separate from his normal priestly clothing just to prepare. And then he has to, down in verse 11, is when it actually happens. He has to present a bull as a sin offering just for himself in verse 11 and for the other priests to make atonement to cover his sins.

Why? What we're being told here is priests are sinners. The High Priest is a sinner. He does not deserve to walk into the tabernacle any more than anybody else does.

And so these priests, they're mediators, but they're not great mediators. That's what we're being told. They're actually sinners. They're corrupted. They're polluted. And so if this is ever going to happen, they have to have their sins atoned for at the very beginning of this thing.

[9 : 47] Now remember, if you're an Israelite in the ancient world, you go up to the temple, but the priest does everything. The priest puts his hand on the animal.

The priest represents you. The priest then takes your sacrifice into the temple, into the tabernacle. The priest is your mediator before God. You don't do any of it.

And what we're being told here is that the priests are sinful like we are. And over the year, over one whole year, it's like all that pollution that they took from you to bear in their body before the Lord and to place it on an animal with their hands, they didn't get it all off.

That's the idea. It's like it's sticky. And once a year, the very first thing that has to happen is the entire priesthood has to be reset. It has to be cleansed or otherwise the mediatorial role of the priest is not going to work symbolically.

Now from just that moment, this preamble, the question arises, what if there could be a better high priest, a mediator who could be a sin-bearer but not himself be polluted by sin?

[11 : 06] You wouldn't need a right like this. What if there could be one? That's the first question that comes up here. Second movement, now the priest is ready to enter. And so verse 12 is when the drama of the entry into the holy place starts.

He takes a censor, a bowl full of hot coals from the altar, and he drops sweet incense upon the coals and he lays it before the curtain of the most holy, the holy of holies.

Why? Because the smoke is going to fill the whole place. And that means when he pulls the curtain back to the holy of holies, he can't see anything. And that's the goal.

He never can see. So the high priest, every year in the day of Atonement Rental, never sees the Ark of the Covenant. It's supposed to be completely blocked by smoke, by incense.

As he die, so that's what he does. He goes in and he pulls back the curtain with the smoke covering so that he can, just like Moses on Exodus 3, not allowed to see the face of the Lord.

[12 : 09] Exodus 33, not allowed to see the face of the Lord. Priest is not allowed to be in God's presence fully. And so it has to be blocked. So the height of the drama is in this moment.

He's going to do this. He's going to pull back the curtain. Will he live? That's the question. Now, the context is Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, they did it. They did this in chapter 10 and they died.

Their dead bodies were laying in the holy of holies. They died. And now the question is, can Aaron live? And he does in this instance. But that's the dramatic height that arises.

They gave strange fire, we're told, in Leviticus 10, not authorized, not in the process of the day of Atonement. They were not purified to enter. And so they were dead.

Now that brings up then the goal of this whole section. What is the goal of the day of Atonement? It's not maybe exactly what you think at first.

[13 : 08] And it takes a pretty careful investigation to really understand the right that's happening to see what the goal is. Here's the goal. Here's the job.

We can see it in verse 14. Here's the job. He, the priest, the high priest shall take some of the blood of the bull that was used for his Atonement, the priest Atonement. And he throws it with his finger on the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant.

And he does it on the east side. And he sprinkles it seven times. And there the mercy seat is literally depicted in the holy of holies as a throne.

So you've got two cherubs there in gold and their wings touch like this. And the mercy seat is the lid that covers the Ark of the Covenant that's depicted also as God's footstool.

So he literally sits above the cherubs in the depiction and he puts his feet on top of the mercy seat. That's the image we get all throughout the Old Testament. And so you're throwing blood upon the

mercy seat, the place where God puts his feet metaphorically by his holy presence.

[14:19] But then what happens from there? And this is where you start to really see the point of the day of Atonement. Verse 15. And then in verse 15, he kills the goat of the sin offering, the first goat that was chosen that's for the sins of the people.

And then he brings it back into the holy place, the second layer of the tabernacle. And he starts sprinkling it over the mercy seat in front of the mercy seat. And then he goes outside of the holy of holies and he starts sprinkling it all over all the furniture.

Right? So he starts sprinkling the blood of Atonement inside the holy of holies and then he starts moving out. And so it's an inside out movement.

And he starts covering all the furniture, sprinkled in blood, the curtain, everything gets covered. And he moves his way from inside back out to the front of the tabernacle, the tent of meeting and exits. All right? So his entrance is just a preamble. It's only the condition. He's got a bath. He's got to get ready. He goes all the way in to cover what? Not the people, but the furniture, the place.

[15:29] And so the idea here, the purpose of the day of Atonement is that he has gone into the temple to push sin back out the gate by a rite of purification, symbol.

So remember that the temple, the tabernacle, is the mimic of the Garden of Eden. And which direction does it face? Anybody remember from the past few times we've gathered?

What direction does the tabernacle face when they set it up? East. And we're told that the Garden of Eden had an east gate. The east gate was the gate that Adam and Eve exited out of when they were exiled away from God's presence.

What the high priest does, like a second Adam, is he goes into the most holy place where the tree of life is mimicked, God's holy throne, his presence, and he pushes the sin out the east gate.

That's the ritual. That's the rite. By a covering, an atonement, a sacrifice that stands in the place of the pollution that's been brought into the temple.

[16:39] Who brought the pollution into the temple? The priest did, because they're sinners. So there's a whole year of accumulation. Nadab and Abihu in particular brought their dead bodies into the holy of holies and polluted the space, brought death.

What did Satan do? What did Adam and Eve do? They brought death into the holy of holies in the Garden of Eden. And so this ritual is once a year pushing sin out the east gate, particularly pushing the corruption, the pollution.

Now when you get out of the east gate lastly, there is also a second goat, and this goat is still alive. And so then the final act is the rite of expulsion.

And here we have this live goat where the high priest now takes it, puts his two hands on it, representing all the unconfessed, unforgiving sins of the people.

And then he hands that goat to a man, a chosen man, and that man, we're told in verse 8, takes the goat to Azazel, A-Z-A-Z-E-L, Azazel.

[17:44] It's untranslated in the ESV. Most Bibles don't translate it. What in the world is Azazel? Okay, well on one hand we don't know. That's why it's not translated.

It says that he takes any bit of pollution and sin left. He puts it on this live goat and a man takes it into the wilderness to Azazel.

Most scholars think it's a reference either to a particular demon, like a word for Satan, or a comprehensive word that means demonic presence in the wilderness.

And so the wilderness, all throughout the Old Testament, is the place where chaos and sin and death belong metaphorically. The garden city, the city of God, the garden of God is where life reigns.

And so what's happening here? Every bit of sin that got pushed out of the east gate symbolically, and then every bit of sin drawn from the city of God, the camp of God's people that's remaining, is now placed on this goat to go wander in the midst of demons and chaos.

[18:51] And we're told the goat is left alive so that the goat will just wander around. There's a couple things going on there. One, sin is getting pushed out.

Two, the goat is meant to wander to speak of a prophecy of waiting. We are waiting. We're waiting for a better system.

And so the goat remains alive, carrying the sin just into a different place away from the city of God. Okay, so that's the day of atonement, right? There's some closing ceremony pieces, but we'll for the sake of time move on.

What does it mean? Let's wrap up. Here's what it means. The cross of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the day of atonement.

The day of atonement is the heart of the heart of the Torah. And in some sense is the heartbeat of the meaning of the Old Testament. And the cross of Jesus Christ fulfills it.

[19 : 53] In other words, the day of atonement is the most important sign, symbol of everything that Jesus came to do at the cross. All right, so let's think about it. I'm just going to give you six quick ways that Jesus fulfills it.

And I've left blanks on the page. These aren't the best worded by me, so maybe you can think about them and clean them up a bit and say them a little more clearly and tightly than I can.

First, think about the movement of Jesus and his passion week. Where does he begin his passion week? He begins by entering the city and going straight to the temple.

And then the rest of his passion week is a movement away from the temple. Right? It's an inside out movement, just like the high priest on the day of atonement.

And where is the out, the movement out? The final thing that happens in the Jesus passion week is he is crucified. He is murdered outside the city of God.

[20 : 56] So we're told explicitly in the New Testament in Hebrews, he was taken outside the camp. So there we're being told Jesus Christ has become the live goat that was pushed outside the camp, crucified in the wilderness, murdered in the wilderness.

He has fulfilled this act of what the New Testament calls propitiation. So first John 2,2, he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the sake of the whole world.

This word propitiation in the New Testament is the word listed here in Leviticus 16 in the Greek translation of the Bible.

In the Greek translation of the Bible, this word propitiation is the word, the day of propitiated, the goat propitiates the people of God. It takes the sin away.

And then first John 2,2 says he is the propitiation. Jesus Christ was murdered outside the camp, outside the city. He has become the true goat, the true lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

[21 : 58] It's an inside out motif. All right, second. Remember that as soon as Jesus is crucified outside the city, like the goat was sent outside the city.

He was buried in a garden, John 20 tells us. And the garden in that moment becomes the symbol of Eden.

So Jesus Christ's dead body was put in where? The Holy of Holies, Eden, the garden, right when he died, right when he died in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

John 20 puts it so nicely. It says it just so happened that there was a garden next to where he was crucified. And John's trying to signal, of course, it didn't just so happen.

He was put in a garden. He was put in the Garden of Eden symbolically. Now the last time a dead body went into the Garden of Eden symbolically, it corrupted it. And they dab in a bayhoo.

[22 : 52] But Jesus' dead body goes into this garden and sits for three days, truly dead. What's the difference? And here's the difference. Meanwhile, you have a better high priest who goes into the heavenly temple and presents his blood before the mercy seat, before God the Father in the heavenly realm.

And God accepts that sacrifice as atoning, as true, as final, as covering not only the sins of the people in Jerusalem, but the sins of the world.

And so that means that Jesus deserves to be raised from the dead. He deserves it. He's just, see what was the problem with the high priest? They were sinners. And so when they went into the temple as our mediators, it didn't really work.

But if you have a high priest who's not a sinner, who goes and is murdered for your sake, atoning God himself, then that blood, that death is truly justifying.

It is actual justice. He really can stand in your place because he was innocent. And so when he dies, he enters as the high priest into the heavenly realm and he presents his blood.

[24 : 06] And by that act, the day of atonement is finished. Once and for all, he's done it. It's accepted. Never again do you have to do Leviticus 16 anymore. Now that means because he's a better high priest, when he's raised from the dead in the garden, that garden, he doesn't corrupt the garden by his dead body.

No, he brings resurrection to the garden. He opens the way to the garden. And so the very next thing that happens, point three, when Jesus dies, think about the Garden of Eden.

Think about where it is symbolically as well in the tabernacle in the temple in the Old Testament. Where is it? It's the Holy of Holies. When Jesus dies, what happens to the Holy of Holies? The curtain tears in two.

And so now there is no cherub blocking the way to the Garden of Eden. There's no cherub in the way to get into the presence of God. And it's not so much that now you can go into God's presence. That's true. But actually the idea there is that God is exiting the Holy of Holies. The tabernacle itself was meant to convey the idea of the whole cosmos in a way the mountain of God was.

[25 : 10] Now the Holy of Holies is open and God's presence has exited to go into the whole cosmos to fill up everything. That's the picture. The Garden of Eden was never meant to stay in one place.

It was meant to burst forth into the whole world from Genesis chapter 2 forward. And that's exactly what happens right when Jesus dies. Number four then, well that was really number four.

The day of atonement, we're told, 1 John 2,2, is not just for the sins of the city of God like in the Old Testament or Jerusalem.

It's for the sins of the whole world. In other words, the day of atonement ritual in the Old Testament was always looking for a cosmic forward to a cosmic day of atonement.

So the cross of Jesus Christ is the cosmic day of atonement. Once and for all, able to cleanse the entire world. Fifth, now where is the temple? The temple has now moved.

[26 : 05] So where is the temple now? The tabernacle, it's fulfillment. Where is it? Yeah, the people, right? I saw somebody say it. The people.

The temple now moves from an isolated location in the middle of the city of Jerusalem out to the people because God's present has left the temple and come to us.

And so now we've become the temples. We no longer have a priesthood. Why? Because we have the great high priest who actually was able to do the day of atonement and it worked. And so you don't need a priesthood anymore.

That's what a priest was for. We're all his priests. That's what the New Testament says, all his temple. And then finally, lastly, point six, later in the book of Leviticus, we learn, and we'll see this towards right before Christmas, that feasting follows the day of atonement.

So after the day of atonement, there's a feast. Now the last thing I'll say is this in verse 31 on the day of atonement ritual, there's a summary statement and it says this, the day of atonement is the Sabbath of solemn rest to you.

[27 : 15] It actually, very literally in Hebrew, it says, it is a Sabbath of Sabbaths to you. So it just says the word Sabbath twice and the second one's plural. It is Shabbat of Shabbat to you, Sabbath of Sabbaths.

Meaning this is the pinnacle holy day. This is the Sabbath above all Sabbath. And on it, what do you do? It says, it's a day where you shall afflict yourselves. What does that mean?

Be fasting, repentance, bowing while this right takes place, these sorts of things. So there's this depth of sadness, fasting, loss at the beginning and then right at the end, a festival starts after the day of atonement.

And in the New Testament, that's why for us, the festival that has begun after the cosmic day of atonement is the Lord's Supper.

The feasting has begun, we feast. And that's why the Lord's Supper, while looking back to the cross of Christ, remembering the cross of Christ the day of atonement, is not a funeral feast.

[28 : 21] The Lord's Supper, while appropriately solemn, appropriately reverent, absolutely, because we're remembering the cross, we're remembering our sin, we are afflicting ourselves in it for a moment.

At the same time, there ought to be a moment in the Lord's Supper where we lift up our heads and say, the festival has come. The day of atonement is already finished. It's time for the feast.

That's why the wine has been poured. Come and keep the feast. Right? And you can see the meaning of the heart right here in the Lord's Supper as well.