

Day of Atonement: The Heart of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Humans normally like clean environments. And to keep it clean, we have routines. Now, just remember, I'm a bachelor, so some of these things might not work out, but we're meant to clean dishes every day.

We wash clothes once a week or so. Now, this one I'm not sure about. We change bedding every couple of weeks, something like that.

And I vacuum once a month. Well, some people, however, don't feel the need to clean that often. And then you get situations like these people.

And so that's a fairly messy lounge. You might not see it, it's a lounge. Here's an even more messy kitchen.

And don't worry, I don't have a picture of the bathroom. But what it does, when you see things like this, it makes you want to clean it up. You can't live with it like that.

[1 : 07] And the reason is that things are only really useful when they're clean and neat and tidy and in order. That's when things can be used to fulfill the purpose they were made for.

Take, for example, a kitchen knife. If you use a knife from the kitchen that we've got up there, it's going to make you really sick, isn't it? And you first have to clean it for it to work in a way that helps you and doesn't harm you.

And this is why the atonement is so necessary in God's will. Because sin messes everything up. It makes things dirty. And atonement is God's way of cleaning it so it becomes fit for purpose again. So it can fulfill its purpose in God's will. And Leviticus 16 is a reminder that we are a much worse contaminants of God's will than we think we are.

But it also shows us that God's grace is so much more than anything our sin can pollute. The Day of Atonement is a key event in the story of the Bible.

[2 : 11] It stands at the center of the Pentateuch or the Torah. That's the first five books of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And you can see Leviticus is in the middle. And Leviticus 16 is in the middle of Leviticus.

So that atonement is at the very heart of God's purpose for the world. And shows the lengths that He will go to. Not just to clean up the mess His people make due to their sin.

But to make them feel welcome in His presence. And so the first thing we are going to look at is how atonement cleans up our mess. How atonement cleans up our mess.

We really grasp how destructive and contaminating our sin really is. We tend to treat sin as private and internal. As something that happens in our hearts.

And it doesn't do much to damage God's world out there. The Day of Atonement in Leviticus confronts us with a stark reality that sin contaminates everything around us.

[3 : 16] It radiates outward from us. Defiling not only people, but the very space where God dwells. In Leviticus 16, before the high priest makes atonement for the people, He first had to cleanse God's space among His people.

So as we read that chapter, I wonder if you noticed that the first thing that gets cleaned are not the people. The blood doesn't go on the people. I'll read from verse 15 and verse 16. This is what the high priest is to do.

He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover. This is the blood now. He will sprinkle the blood on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way, He will make atonement for the most holy place.

Because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites. Whatever their sin has been, He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of the uncleanness.

And so what He does is He takes a bull for Himself. His own sins must be atoned for. The high priest, as He goes in and makes atonement for God's people. And He takes the goat as well. We'll

look at that in a minute.

[4 : 19] And He splashes it all over. Strange. Why would He have to clean those things if the sin of the people is outside?

Something has happened. The people's sin had somehow leaked into the tabernacle itself. It tells us how powerful sin is. It's a corrosive agent.

It spreads. It attaches. And it leaves a trail of filth and disorder. And most of the time, we don't even notice it. At U-Turn, when I was working there, one of the clients was called Uncle Bertie.

He's passed away now, so I can tell the story without worrying about making him feel bad. We had a client who had a huge bush of hair.

Huge bush of hair. And then this huge bushy beard. And he would take a shower every morning as he went off to work. And he'd had a really, really dirty job. Because he would come back smelling and just really filthy.

[5 : 28] But the thing is, he would use the kitchen towels that were right next to the showers to wash himself. And, I mean, he really washed himself. We talk in every nook and cranny.

He would give himself a deep clean every morning. And then he would take the other kitchen towels and dry himself off. And we didn't know this until many, many months, or a couple of months while I was working there.

I took a shower as well. And I was like, Bertie, but where are your towels, Brie? And he's like, no, I use the kitchen towels. Whoa! And for all those days and weeks and months and years, in fact, while he'd been there in the shelter, those kitchen towels were unknowingly used to clean and dry all the dishes and the knives and the forks and the plates that everyone else was using.

I always wondered why the chicken tasted funny while I was there. But what we see is that sin, that's what sin does. We don't see what it does.

We think it's internal, but sin, like dirt, just spreads. And the first thing it does is mess up our relationship with God. And because of that, it muddies and dirties everything else around us.

[6 : 50] That's why God, when he makes atonement, when he cleans up our mess, he's got to start the cleaning process at the very center of where God meets with his people, with the tabernacle, the curtains, the physical space.

But as you notice, there's blood everywhere, which is a strange cleaning agent. It sounds weird to our Western ears that God uses blood to clean things. But actually, we all know that the spilling of blood in a ritual indicates something really important and really powerful.

In fact, in the next chapter, Leviticus 17 and verse 11, God tells us exactly why blood does this. He says this, For the life of a creature is in its blood, and I've given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar.

It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Of course, the blood of animals can't really pay for human sin.

Only human blood can do that. And so God, in his amazing grace and his mercy, sends Jesus, who voluntarily sheds his blood on our behalf.

[8 : 12] One death that pays for all the sins and the uncleanness of everyone who trusts in it. So that's why we read from Hebrews 9. I'm going to go there again.

Hebrews 9 verse 13 says this, So there's a cleaning that happens, but it's all on the outside.

And he says, How much more then will the blood of dirtiness and ugliness that we get when we've accumulated sin in our life, or if we've been sinned against? The blood of Christ is the only thing that stops sin at its source on the inside of us.

It breaks the cycle of sin so that we can function like we were originally made to do. To serve the living God. So two things I think this highlights for us.

One is, we need to be careful of taking our sins too lightly. We need to be careful of taking our sins too lightly. Jesus, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, becomes a man and his blood, this sinless, perfect man with holy blood, sheds it for you to clean you from your sin.

[9 : 48] So don't mess up your life and the lives of those around you by continuing in sin or treating your sin like it's a small thing. It's very easy to do that because we don't see how sin attaches to everything.

It's not a small thing. Sin is a deadly evil thing. It just messes up everything around us. Don't take your sin lightly.

It costs Jesus his life. And so deal with your sins seriously. Take repentance seriously. If there are things that you've done that you've messed up your relationship with others, go and fix it. You've messed up your relationship with God, go and fix it. The Day of Atonement was a serious and solemn day. At the end of the chapter, God tells them to have this as a constant ongoing event in their life.

He says this in verse 31. 16 verse 31. He tells the Israelites to treat the Day of Atonement as a Sabbath of solemn rest. And that they must deny themselves.

[11:04] And that it would be an everlasting ordinance. So they're to take their sins seriously, not lightly. Because back then it cost bulls and goats.

And for us, it cost the life of the Son of God to make us clean. The danger in a liturgical church like ours is just to say the confession like we do every week.

But not to mean it. To think you've just ticked the box and then to go off unchanged. But don't do that. So during the week, if you catch yourself not living up to your calling as a Christian, take some time out.

Say, whoa, hang on, hang on, hang on. There's something wrong here. Don't continue making everything dirty around you. Stop then and there in your tracks.

Take it to Jesus. Confess to Him. And let Him make you clean again. So don't be careful of taking our sins too lightly. The other thing is we mustn't take the atonable small little kids.

[12:10] And they run around. And they just have this ability to make whatever they bring in from the outside just goes all over the house. Even adults are like that in God's world because of sin.

We cannot but help make things dirty and mess things up. But God knows us and He's factored this into our relationship with Him. Hebrews chapter 7 verse 24, 25 says this, Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore He's able to save completely those who come to God through Him. Because He always lives to intercede for them. And so if you're trying to deal with the sin of your past or stubborn sin in the present, don't be so overwhelmed or so overcome that you're not taking them back to God or to Jesus to get Him to wash it away.

Sin does separate us from God, but not if you're a Christian. God has set up our relationship with Him such that the blood of Jesus continues to clean us and make us new.

And so keep taking your sin to Jesus. Don't let it continue to separate you from Him. Well, there's another thing that sin does. It messes up our lives.

[13:31] It messes up our relationship with God. It messes up the world around us. And so the blood of Christ cleans us from that. But there's another thing that sin does. Sin doesn't just make us unclean.

It also fills our lives with garbage. With rubbish. It weighs us down. It trips us up and complicates our lives in a way that makes it difficult for us to sort of move forward in life.

And so in atonement, God makes yet another promise. Don't worry. I'm going to remove all the sin from you. Atonement removes the garbage in our lives.

And we see this quite literally in the next part of the atonement ritual. The ritual of the scapegoat. And so this is about taking out our rubbish. In the Day of Atonement, in the Day of Atonement ceremony, there's a unique sacrifice of two goats in one.

And if you notice that while we're reading. There are two goats, but it's described as a single sacrifice. And so you take one goat and you sacrifice it and you splash the blood inside the temple.

[14:43] Inside the tabernacle. But then you do something else with the other goat. It's a scapegoat. It gets sent out into the wilderness. And so God shows his people that their sins are being carried far, far away.

Never to come back. To influence them or trip them up. Or hinder their relationship and their fellowship with him. Or their relationship with others. So verse 21 and 22. The high priest is to lay, is to take the scapegoat and to lay both his hands on the head of the live goat.

And confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites. All their sins. And put them on the goat's head.

And then he shall send the goat away into the wilderness. In the care of someone appointed for the task. And the goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place. And there it shall be released into the wilderness.

Would have been an incredibly moving scene in ancient Israel. So on the Day of Atonement, all the Israelites would have gathered at the temple precinct, at the tabernacle. And then later on in the temple in Jerusalem.

[15 : 59] And they would have seen the high priest go in. Make his sacrifices. They wouldn't have seen that. They would only know that he's made his sacrifices as he came out.

And then the next thing they would have seen. Is him putting his hands on the goat. Praying over them. Confessing all of their sins. And then as they're standing there, the goat is taken out. Through their midst. Out into the wilderness. He watches goat carrying your sins. Being led away. Out.

Outside. Now there's actually another possible meaning to this word scapegoat. Depending on the translation in your Bible. It could also be called the goat for Azazel.

I don't know if you've got that in your... Depends on your translation. But wherever you see the word scapegoat, it sometimes uses the word Azazel. The goat for Azazel. It's just a play on the Hebrew word.

[16 : 55] And so if that's true. If that's so. That it can be the goat for Azazel. It would indicate that the goat is being sent away to a sort of a demon or a devil type being in the wilderness.

If that's the case, then what God is doing is sending all the sins of his people. All the unclean, dirty, impure stuff that no one wants.

And he kind of wraps it up in a goat as a kind of anti-gift to the devil. In the atonement, God unloads all the sins of his people and sends the devil all their rubbish.

The New Testament picks this kind of language up when it tells us what the cross does to the cosmic forces of evil. So Colossians 2 verse 13 says this.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the record of our legal debt, which stood against us and condemned us. He has taken it away.

[17 : 58] There's that language of removal. And he nails it to the cross. But what else does the cross do? It then says, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

It's almost like this ultimate cosmic prank. God keeps the people for himself. He makes them clean. And he gives the stuff that no one wants back to the devil.

The devil's been trying to get us this whole time, ever since Genesis 1. He's been trying to mess up our relationship with God. And God says, you know what? I'm going to keep my people. You can get the stuff that no one else wants.

Either way, what's happening is the complete removal of the rubbish that sin causes in the lives of God's people.

Jesus has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages. By the most holy place, once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. Eternal redemption.

[19 : 06] Redemption that lasts. Redemption that stays. Redemption that fully removes all the sin and the rubbish and the gunk in our lives.

Verse 26, the same chapter says this. Jesus has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. It's the complete removal of every sin committed by you if you're a Christian.

Isn't that good news? Completely taken away. This is why Jesus says in Matthew 11, he says this. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. I'm gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And so, if you find yourself under the heavy weight of sin, if you're still carrying your sin with you, if there are things in your life that's dragging you down, Jesus' invitation is for you.

[20 : 13] Come to him. Let him take your sin from you. Give it to him. He was sent as your scapegoat. Let the devil take your rubbish, and let Jesus lighten your load.

But like in the first part where we saw that we mustn't take our sins too lightly, we mustn't take the atonement too lightly, we must let Jesus carry our sins away.

Don't hold on to them. So many people do that in their lives, and again, especially sins of the past, or sins they're struggling with at the moment. And that would be like, imagine the scapegoat was going out amongst the people in Israel, and then someone said, no, no, no, you can't take my sins, I want to keep my sins.

And then they grab the goat, and they're holding the goat now. And everyone said, no, let the goat go, your sins must go that way. So don't hold on to your sins. Give them to Jesus, but then let him take them from you.

Give them fully. Don't keep on holding on to them. Reckon as if they are truly gone. Psalm 103 says this, For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

[21 : 38] As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions. They're never to come back.

They're never to meet again. Full forgiveness. Full removal. A fully restored and new life. That can serve the living God in a new and free way.

Not entangled. Not weighed down by your sins. So don't. When you've confessed your sins. When you've asked Jesus for forgiveness. When you hear often, almost every week you hear from us in the liturgy.

What are called the comfortable words. Receive. The whole purpose of having our sins washed away and cleaned and removed is to be functional people in God's world.

A temple is a place where God meets the world. And the New Testament describes us as the temple of the Holy Spirit. That's why we've got to be cleaned, washed, and have our sins removed so we can function as a proper temple, spreading good things into the world, not our junk into the world.

[22 : 49] We are to be the place where people come to, to get forgiveness for their sins, to find reconciliation with God, and to help relieve their burdens.

We're not to add to their burdens by judging them. And so, in your life, make sure that the things that are offered here in the Day of Atonement, the things that Jesus has given us, you give to others.

Be quick to forgive. Not quick to hold on to other people's sins. Be quick to give grace. Be generous with your grace and mercy. Don't be snub with your grace and mercy.

The Day of Atonement, the blood is splashed everywhere. Grace and mercy is just splashed all over the place. God isn't worried about who's going to take it and who's not going to take it. Just give it. He will decide what to do with it.

He will clean where He wants to clean. Be a place where forgiveness, grace, mercy, reconciliation and atonement are the hallmarks of your dealings with others.

[24 : 00] The word atonement is an old English word. It literally means at-one-ment. There's a sense of appeasement and reconciliation and fellowship. You're not going to let other people's sins bug you so much that you're going to cut yourself off from them or cut them off from God.

In your attitudes. In judging them and making them feel unwelcome. We've got to show these things both to Christians and to non-Christians. And so friends, yes, we're to be holy, but our holiness is not to keep people away from experiencing God's presence.

The whole purpose of the Day of Atonement is for God to welcome people into His presence. So they can enjoy Him and live life unfettered and free from worry about their past and the uncleanness and be clean and spread His love, His grace into the world.

The veil has been torn in two. The way to God is open. We must welcome others in just as God has done for us. Well, let me pray for us so we can do this well in our lives.

Lord Jesus, we recognize, Lord, that your blood was shed for us. And we can't really, Lord, describe what a wonder and glory that is for us.

[25 : 16] We who don't deserve it. The most unworthy, Lord, to receive the holy, worthy, precious blood of Christ. And yet, in your mercy, in your grace, in your love, you've decided to give us these amazing things.

It's to wash us clean. In Jesus' name. Amen.