



Once and for All

Kicking It Off

What is one chore or task in your life that never seems to stay done, no matter how many times you do it?

Read

Leviticus 16:6-10,
20-22 and Hebrews
10:11-14

Summary

If you were God, you would probably get rid of evil the moment it showed up. Most of us would. The trouble is that evil does not float around on its own. It lives in people, which means deleting evil would mean deleting us. Leviticus 16 shows God doing something else. He stays in the middle of a camp full of sinful people, and once a year He gives them a way to deal with every sin they have committed.

The day is the Day of Atonement, and it centers on one man and two goats. The high priest goes behind the curtain alone, first to make atonement for his own sin, then for everyone else, while the whole nation waits outside and fasts. One goat is killed and its blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat. Most of us have heard that part before: sin is paid for with blood. The second goat is the surprise. The priest puts both hands on its head, confesses every sin of the people over it, and a man leads it out into the wilderness, where it never comes back. One goat pays for sin, and the other carries the guilt away.

That was the system, and it had to be repeated every single year. Even the priest needed forgiveness. The blood never stopped flowing.

Then Jesus comes, and He is both goats and the priest at once. He died for sin, and He was cast out carrying our guilt, and where that goat wandered off into the wilderness, Jesus rose and went into God's presence to speak on our behalf. The Old Testament priests never sat down, because their work was never finished. Jesus sat down. That means the thing Israel did every year is done for good, and the guilt you

keep carrying around was already carried out of the camp. You do not have to keep paying for it. You get to rest in what He finished.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. If God simply deleted evil wherever He found it, He would have to start with people, and instead He made a way for sinners to live near Him (16:16). What does it tell you about God that He chose to stay in the middle of His people's mess rather than wipe it out?
3. Aaron's first sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was for his own sin, and he made it as a father still grieving the death of his two sons (16:1-6). When has grief or disappointment made it hard for you to come near to God?
4. One goat died to pay for sin, and the other carried the people's sins into the wilderness where they could not come back (16:21-22). Which is harder for you to believe, that your sin has been paid for or that it has actually been carried away?
5. Forgiveness rests on the sacrifice of Jesus, not on how well we pray or how sorry we manage to feel. Where are you still trying to earn forgiveness by the quality of your repentance?
6. The priests stood every day offering the same sacrifices, but Christ offered Himself once and sat down (Hebrews 10:11-12). What would change this week if you lived as though the work of dealing with your guilt were truly finished?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"There's two parts to this. There's a living goat and there's a dead goat, one that you kill and one that you keep alive. And we're like, we get the dead goat. You get the blood of that, you sprinkle it, and we're clean. We're good. And God's like, yeah, that's part one. There's part two. If I ask most people who grew up in the church whether they understand the atonement system, they'll say, yes, blood is required to cover my sins. And I would say yes. But there's also a living aspect that is required for the covering of your sins."

"A lot of people say, Pastor, will you pray for me, because my words aren't that good and your words are better. And I'm here for you. The elders are here to pray with you. But I want you to understand, it's not about how good your prayer is. It's about how good the blood is. It's about how good the body is. It's about how good the sacrifice is. I can't pay for your sins. But I know one who can, and His name is Jesus."

"I don't know how many times I hear from people that they don't want to come to church anymore because church grew them up with a sense of guilt and shame. And part of me is like, that's the whole point. Your guilt and shame over your sin was placed on Jesus Himself, and Jesus was cast out for your

guilt and your shame. So why are you living in guilt and shame? You should be living in celebration that there is a scapegoat, and that the scapegoat isn't dead. The whole point of the scapegoat is that the scapegoat lives."

"Priests don't sit. They stand the entire service, because there's a lot of work to be done. They only sit when it's all completed. So Jesus sitting at the right hand of God is a proclamation. It's done. It's finished. Your sin has been paid for and atoned for. Can I say this with more fervor so you understand? Or I'll say it even quieter. Once your sins are forgiven and atoned for, your sins past, present, and future, it's done."

Sermon Notes**Leviticus 16:6-10**

6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. 7 Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. 9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord and use it as a sin offering, 10 but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

Leviticus 16:20-22

20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

Outline

1. One Man, One Day - Leviticus 16:1-19

- a. If we were God we would delete evil on sight. God chose a better way, an economy in which blood, given as life, covers iniquity so that sinners can live near Him instead of being destroyed.
- b. Nadab and Abihu died bringing fire God had not commanded (16:1-2), and in His strictness God did not destroy the whole sinful camp. He told their grieving father how to come near.
- c. God never left. The camp surrounded the tabernacle, and the tent "dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness" (16:16).
- d. One man on one day: the high priest atones for himself first, in plain linen, while the nation fasts and waits outside (16:6, 11, 17).
- e. Blood is sprinkled seven times on the mercy seat under a cloud of incense (16:12-14). Mercy seat and propitiation share a root, the bridge between a common people and a holy God.
- f. Even the priest needed atonement, so the blood never stopped flowing. By Jesus' day the temple looked like a butcher shop, and the traders had turned it into a profit (John 2:13-16).

2. The Goat Walks Away - Leviticus 16:5-10, 20-34

- a. Two goats, chosen by lot. One is killed and its blood sprinkled, and the other is kept alive. The Day of Atonement needs both, a part one and a part two.
- b. Aaron lays both hands on the live goat, confesses all the iniquities of Israel over it, and sends it to a remote area in the wilderness (16:21-22). Azazel is traditionally the scapegoat, the goat that wears the people's guilt.
- c. The sins already covered by blood are carried away as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).
- d. The people afflict themselves and do no work, and "you shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins" (16:29-30). Mourning and celebration on the same day.
- e. A statute forever, once in the year (16:34). Since the temple fell in AD 70 there has been no altar and no goat, and many of our Jewish neighbors still keep the day and wait for the Messiah.

3. The Completed Building - Hebrews 7:25-27; 9:11-12, 24-28; 10:11-14, 19-22; John 1:29; 1 John 2:1-2

- a. A High Priest who needs no sacrifice for Himself, holy and unstained, who offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 7:26-27) and entered by His own blood (9:11-12).
- b. Christ fulfills both goats. The sin of the world was laid on Him and He was cast out, the Lamb who takes away sin (John 1:29; Hebrews 9:28), and He did not only die, He lives.

- c. He always lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25), our advocate and the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1-2), now in the presence of God on our behalf (9:24), so the church is no place for guilt and shame.
- d. Forgiveness rests on how good the blood is rather than how good the prayer is. A pastor is not a priest. He leads people to the One who paid.
- e. The priests stand every day, and Christ sat down (Hebrews 10:11-12). It is finished, so we draw near with confidence (10:19-22) and need no yearly Day of Atonement.
- f. Leviticus is the blueprint and Christ is the completed building. At the table we take in the body and blood that already covered us, and we live for one another.

Notes

When someone wants to test whether faith holds up, the question is usually the problem of evil. How could there be a loving God when there is so much unnecessary suffering? People assume Christians will put up their hands and say, I don't know, just believe in Jesus and it will all go away. That is not our answer. The cross is God's answer to evil, and it is more hopeful and more redeeming than anything you or I could come up with.

It starts in Genesis. God made Adam and Eve in His image and gave them every avenue to obey Him, and deceived by the serpent, they chose to decide for themselves what was good. Everything after the garden flows from that choice, and every person in the Bible except one carries the same deceit. Compress the Bible into one idea and it is God responding to evil, though not the way you or I would.

Here is the assumption under the question. If I were God and evil showed up, I would delete it, and I agree that is a good response to evil. So do we worship an imperfect God? People wound people with violence, manipulation, and lies, and God does not seem to snuff it out. He lets them live. God chose what I will argue is a better way. He will deal with evil finally, and in the meantime He created an economy, a system in which blood and sacrifice atone for sin. In Leviticus, blood and life are interchangeable. Blood is given to cover iniquity, so an unholy people can live near a holy God instead of being destroyed by Him.

Common people cannot walk into the holy place, and when the holy meets the unholy unprotected, there is death. Chapter 16 opens with exactly that: "after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died" (16:1). Nadab and Abihu brought fire God had not commanded. We say God is strict, and He is, but in His strictness He did not kill everyone in a camp full of sinners. Their sin came too close to His holiness. Then God speaks to a grieving father and tells him how to walk into the room that killed his sons. If I were Aaron I would say, Lord, You just took my sons, I am still bitter, I am not holy, who am I to come near You? And God says, you're right, which is why you need atonement. Aaron's first sacrifice is for himself.

God never left them, though. The camp was arranged around the tabernacle because He wanted to be at the center of their lives, and the tent "dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness" (16:16). If I were a holy God, I would wipe out the evil around me. God in His perfect holiness let a sinful people surround Him and live.

So on one day a year, Yom Kippur, everything rests on one man. The high priest trades his glorious garments for plain linen and offers a bull for himself and his house. He carries coals and incense inside the veil so a cloud covers the mercy seat "so that he does not die," and he sprinkles blood on it seven times (16:12-14). No one else may be in

the tent until he comes out (16:17), and the whole nation fasts and prays outside. Say what you want about Israel, but every year they practiced repentance, fasting, and prayer, and confessed that they were not so good and needed God's atoning power.

In both Hebrew and Greek, mercy seat and propitiation come from the same root. Propitiation is the five dollar word for having your sins paid for by something else, and the mercy seat bridges the gap between a common people and the holiness of God. I will be the first to say I do not fully understand how blood covers my sins, and it remains a mystery how this economy fully works. I would never have designed a moral system where blood answers for iniquity. God is satisfied with it.

Then comes the part I had not really understood until this week. There are two goats, and the lots decide which is which. One is killed and its blood is sprinkled, and none of that is new, since Leviticus has told us over and over that blood covers iniquity. The new part is the goat that stays alive. Aaron lays both hands on its head, confesses over it "all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins," and sends it into the wilderness, and "the goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area" (16:21-22). Azazel has traditionally been read as the scapegoat, the goat that wears the people's guilt, and it can also be read as the wilderness it is driven into. The sins already covered by blood are carried out of the camp, as far as the east is from the west.

Most people who grew up in church will tell you blood is required to cover sin. True, and God says there are two parts. Part one is a dead goat, part two is a living one, and the Day of Atonement requires both. So the day held mourning and celebration together. The people afflicted themselves and did no work, and on that day "you shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins" (16:30). All of them, for the whole year, "once in the year," as "a statute forever" (16:29, 34). When God says forever, He means forever.

That is why AD 70 left the rabbis in such a hard place. The temple fell and the sacrifices stopped. With no altar for the blood and no goat for the wilderness, they taught that God forgives through prayer, repentance, and good works. I pray constantly for our Jewish neighbors, who are so close, who love the Scriptures I love, and many of whom are still waiting for the Messiah. But God gave a specific economy for dealing with sin, and prayer alone was never it.

When I read Leviticus, all I see is Jesus. By His day the blood never stopped flowing, because even the priest needed atonement, and the temple looked more like a butcher shop than a sanctuary laden with gold. Traders turned God's system into a profit, and Jesus made a whip and turned over the tables, while the Lamb who would be slain stood in the courts.

Hebrews is how I read Leviticus. "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27). Hebrews does not call the system a mistake. When Christians read the same text as the Jews, we say amen, and the New Testament fulfills the Old rather than abolishing it. Ours is the one Priest who needed no sacrifice of His own, and He entered "not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:12).

He fulfills both goats. The sin of the world was placed on Christ and He was cast out like the living goat, and He did not only die, He also lived. When the scapegoat went out, the guilt went with it and never came back. He was "offered once to bear the sins of many" (9:28), "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Death and life are both required for this true propitiation. Now "he always lives to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25). "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2). His blood is sufficient for all the brokenness in the world. The question is whether He is your priest.

So your forgiveness does not rest on your prayer. People ask me to pray for them because they think my words are better than theirs. I am glad to, but forgiveness turns on how good the blood is rather than how good the prayer is. That is also why I am not a priest. A priest says, you need me, I will make sure you and God are good. I cannot pay for your sins. I know the One who can, and His name is Jesus.

Christ entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24). He is doing a priest's work, speaking for you, and a priest is not there to pile on guilt. The goat said, you are guilty, and I am taking your guilt away. So don't be so guilty, church. I often hear from people who left church because it raised them in guilt and shame. Your guilt and shame were placed on Jesus rather than a goat, and He was cast out for them. The whole point of the scapegoat is that it lives. Jesus bore your guilt, rose, and sits at the Father's right hand as your advocate, so you can live in celebration instead of guilt and shame.

Priests do not sit, because the work is never done. "Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:11-12). A seated High Priest means it is finished. Your sins past, present, and future are atoned for, and we need no Day of Atonement every year. Good Friday is the day we remember that our guilt and shame died with Christ on the

cross, and Easter does not mean we do it all again next year. So the church is no place to guilt one another or decide who is in and who is out. Everyone who believes in Jesus is in. "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:19, 22).

Leviticus is a good blueprint. The blood and the smoke of the animals led to the mercy of God. It makes me angry when churches refuse to preach the Old Testament, because the blueprint shows how perfectly Jesus answered every part of it. He is the completed building, and you can trust His finished work.

That is why the table matters. I cannot bring a goat onto this platform, kill it, and tell you that you are forgiven. There is One who brought no goat and gave His own body and His own blood. This table points to Him, the One who already paid once for all, and we are not atoned for again here. Jesus did not call the bread and the cup a metaphor. He said this is My body and this is My blood, for you. The priests sprinkled blood on the altar, and Jesus has us take it in. Covered by Him, we love one another, care for one another, and sacrifice for one another by the power of the Holy Spirit. The body and blood of Jesus have covered all your sin, and the guilt and shame that came with it, God has dealt with.

Blog

We're a couple of months into Leviticus now, and I know it has started to feel like the same thing every week. Another animal, another altar, more blood, more rules for how to come near, and then next week the same thing again. If that's how it has felt to you, you aren't reading it wrong. Israel felt the same way, and Leviticus 16 is where all that repetition starts to point somewhere.

Leviticus 16 describes the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Our Jewish neighbors observed it just a couple of weeks ago, beginning at sundown on September 20. It is still the most solemn day of the Jewish year, a day of fasting and rest, and the only fast the Law of Moses commands (Leviticus 16:29-31). Since the temple was destroyed in AD 70, it has been kept without a priest, an altar, or a sacrifice. Christians don't observe Yom Kippur, but there is still a lot for us to learn from it.

The chapter opens at a funeral. It begins "after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died" (16:1). Nadab and Abihu had offered unauthorized fire, and fire came out from the Lord and consumed them (10:1-2). Now God speaks to their grieving father about how to walk into the room where his sons died. Aaron is told "not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die" (16:2). So once a year, one man goes in. First he takes off the garments of the high priest and puts on plain linen (16:4). He offers a bull for his own sin before anyone else's (16:6, 11), because the man who makes atonement for everyone needs atonement himself. Then he carries burning coals and incense behind the curtain, so that a cloud of smoke covers the mercy seat, "so that he does not die" (16:13). The mercy seat was the gold lid on the ark of the covenant, the place where God said He would appear (16:2). It was the most hidden object in all of Israel. One man saw it for a few minutes a year, through smoke, while everyone else waited outside (16:17).

Blood, smoke, and mercy (the title of the series).

God says the tent of meeting "dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness" (16:16). He doesn't leave His people because they are unclean. But He doesn't ignore their uncleanness either. He cleans His own house. The high priest sprinkles blood on and in front of the mercy seat seven times (16:14-15), cleansing the sanctuary of everything Israel's sin had defiled over the past year.

The blood cleans the house, but the guilt is still in the camp. That's where the second goat comes in. Aaron takes two male goats from the people as one sin offering (16:5), and lots are cast over them. The first goat is killed, and its blood is carried behind the curtain. The second goat is not killed at all. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and

all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness." (Leviticus 16:21-22) This is where we get the word "scapegoat." The text says the goat is "for Azazel" (16:8, 10), and nobody knows for sure what that name means. But anyone can see what happens. The goat walks away carrying every sin of the people, and it doesn't come back.

So the two goats deal with sin in two ways. The first deals with its penalty. Sin requires blood, a life given, and the first goat pays it. The second deals with its presence. The guilt is placed on its head and carried out of the camp, and Israel could stand at the edge and watch it go. Both goats point to Christ.

We know about the goat that dies. We know Jesus shed His blood on the cross, and that "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). But the goat that keeps pulling me back is the one that lives. It carried the guilt away and kept on living. That points to the importance of Christ being risen and at the right hand of the Father, where "he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Our guilt is no longer our own, and we have a High Priest who advocates and mediates for us continuously (1 John 2:1).

The goat went away from God, into the wilderness. Christ went the other way. He entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24).

The chapter ends with this: "And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins" (16:34). Once in the year. Then the next year, again, and the year after that. Every autumn the same day, the same blood, the same goat led out into the wilderness. Hebrews says, "But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3-4).

The fatigue you might feel reading Leviticus, Israel felt every year. The repetition was telling them that this was never meant to be the end.

Leviticus is the blueprint. It is perfect, God explaining to a very specific people how He is to be approached. Thankfully, God never said their uncleanness or commonness disqualified them from His presence. Their commonness just required specific steps for them to approach Him. The problem was never the blueprint. Humanity constantly failed the blueprint it was given.

Jesus isn't another blueprint. He is the completed building. "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). He is the Priest who

needed no sacrifice for Himself (7:27), the goat that died, and the goat that carried our sin away, all at once. Christ has fulfilled every specific step for humanity to enter the presence of a holy God.

"Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (10:11-12). The priests in the tabernacle never sat down, because their work was never done. Jesus sat down. A seated High Priest means the work is finished. And like Israel standing outside the tent, we are waiting for our High Priest to come out again. He "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28).

So this is not a call to want more sacrifice, and it isn't a call to start keeping Yom Kippur. It's a reason to be thankful. Look at what the people did on that day. They fasted, and they did no work at all (16:29-31). One man did everything, and they were told, "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins" (16:30). Atonement was made for them. They couldn't add to it. They could only rest.

The Day of Atonement is now a day in which we rest in the work of Christ alone.