

Lesson 4

A Sacrifice for Sin

Introduction

Order. Substance. Purpose. Peace. Life. All of these spiritual qualities were literally in abundance inside the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in close fellowship and union with God. The presence of God was with them, Genesis 3.8. They walked and talked with God in the cool of the day. They trusted God. What He said, they believed. They communed with God. All of creation was perfect and lived in harmony. Life was good in the warmth of God's light.

One day, Satan came along and told Adam and Eve lies about God. He claimed that God was flawed, defective, and jealous. He said God did not want them to know good and evil because He did not want them as equals. Satan also claimed that God told them a lie when He said they would die if they ate of the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve believed Satan over God. They bought into Satan's lies, choosing to succumb to temptation.

By their deeds, the world was forever and instantly changed. For the first time, mankind felt separation from God. All innocence was lost. In Genesis 2.25, Scripture records that before sin, Adam and Eve were both naked and were not ashamed. But, after disobeying God, Adam and Eve felt an overpowering sense of shame. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths, 3.7. When God appeared, they hid themselves in fear, 3.10.

Ever since, our world has been subjected to darkness, desolation, and destruction. Mankind is blocked from fellowship with God. Decay, disease, and death are a certainty. Isaiah said:

the way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace. . . . We hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men.

– Isaiah 59:9-10.

After the fall of man, God immediately enacted His bold plan to redeem us from sin. Instead of instantly wiping out Adam and Eve, God in His grace chose to spare them. He moved toward mankind's redemption and the restoration of intimate fellowship with His creation.

Understanding Sacrifice

The offering up of sacrifices should be regarded as a divine institution.

Sacrifice did not originate with man. God Himself appointed it as the mode in which acceptable worship was to be offered to Him by guilty man. As we read the Old Testament, we learn about five important principles that have significant meaning in regard to the intent behind sacrifice.

Sacrifice always had a purpose

In any dispensation, God has never asked mankind to direct its faith toward a mindless, illogical, nothingness. God's righteousness is not arbitrary. Be it in the patriarchal times where God communicated directly with man, or during the Levitical period where God communicated through the Mosaic law, sacrifice has always been about *obedience to a prescribed plan*. The purpose is related to the principle found communicated in the law:

the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

– Leviticus 17.11

In the New Testament we see the principle repeated:

without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin,

– Hebrews 9.22

Sacrifice is the graphic picture that an innocent life has to be given in order to cover sinners

In Scripture, acceptable sacrifice is always associated with atonement.

The offering of dead animals to God served as a substitute in the place of the guilty sinner

There were many blood sacrifices offered to God before the giving of the Law in Exodus. Genesis 4.3-7; 8.20; 12.8; and Job 1.5 serve as sufficient examples.

God provides the sacrifice

In Genesis 22.8, as Abraham prepared to offer Isaac on the altar, he responded to Isaac's question in this way: *God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son*. God did provide a sacrifice, 22.13. After the establishment of the Levitical covenant, the components used in sacrifice were part of the bountiful physical blessings God provided His people. Ultimately, the principle of God providing the sacrifice is carried through to Jesus Himself. John referred to Jesus as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, John 1.29.

Acceptable sacrifice has always involved the best things and the first things.

Genesis 4 reveals that Abel's offering was of the *firstlings* of his flock. **He gave his best**. During the time of the Levitical priesthood, sacrifices were to be made of the firstlings of the flock, Exodus 13.12; Numbers 18.17; Proverbs 3.9; and they were to be made without blemish, Leviticus 1.3. In Malachi 1.8, God condemned the Jews for offering up sacrifices with lame and sick animals.

The Messiah is the Ultimate Sacrifice

The message found in Hebrews 8-10 makes it clear that the blood of bulls and goats could never atone for the sin of mankind. A greater sacrifice had to be made. It is by the blood of Christ that our eternal redemption has been secured, Hebrews 9.12b. In Romans 3 Paul explains Jesus' purpose for dying on the cross:

- Romans 3.23 - *for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*
- Romans 3.24 - *our justification is by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*
- Romans 3.25 - *God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.* God, the One who has been violated, dishonored, and blasphemed by sin, determined how the debt of sin could be paid. He determined it would take the substitutionary death of His Son. By the death of Jesus, God was fully satisfied. The penalty for sin was paid in full.

In the previous section, we examined five basic principles regarding sacrifice. How did the work Jesus did on the cross fit perfectly into God's design?

- Read Hebrews 2.17 and Romans 3.25. The **purpose** of Jesus' activity on the cross was *to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*
- Satan had no claim on Jesus, John 14.30. He was **innocent** in every way. See 1 Peter 2.22; 1 John 3.5; and Hebrews 7.26.
- Jesus was our **substitute**. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,* 2 Corinthians 5.21. Paul said *Jesus our Lord was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification,* Romans 4.24b-25. See also 1 Peter 2.24.
- **God** provided the sacrifice, see again Romans 3.25 and John 1.29. It has been said that Ephesians 1 presents one of the best overall pictures of God's grand scheme of redemption. That plan hinged on Jesus, *to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth,* Ephesians 1.9-10.
- Acceptable sacrifice has always involved the **best** things and the **first** things. Jesus was perfectly sinless. Seven hundred years before His death, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus did no violence and *there was no deceit found in his mouth,* Isaiah 53.9. In writing about Him the Hebrew writer has said, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin,* Hebrews 4.15.

Conclusion

Where would we be without the Messiah? Ephesians 2.1-3 says that we would be hopelessly lost and dead in sin. But thanks be to God, who took the initiative and rescued us from sin. Never get too far from the fact of what it took to save you.

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What was the purpose behind sacrifice?
2. What can we learn about God by His providing a sacrifice?
3. Why do you think Abel's offering was accepted while Cain's was rejected?
4. What is the point of Romans 3.23-26?
5. What was the purpose of Jesus' death?
6. What do the Scriptures say about Jesus' innocent life?
7. How does the fact that Jesus died in your place impact you personally?
8. Besides the Isaiah passage (53.9), find a few other prophecies that relate to the perfection of Jesus.
9. What are some ways you can better appreciate what Jesus did for you?