

Sermon Text for February 6, 2022

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Leviticus 16:20-22, Hebrews 10:8-14

“Once is enough”

So how is your reading through Leviticus going? It is a slog, isn't it? I spoke to a few of you and some of you are slowing down on the readings. Can I say, don't worry, after this we have Numbers, then things really get interesting with all the Hebrew names and the begats. But as I mentioned in other settings, I find it really helpful to be reading in chunks and sections, I find I can follow it easier. I hope you are finding the same and getting meaning out of it. We continue our sermon series on reading through the Bible, you can join us online or in the booklet.

But in spite of the dullness of Leviticus it is a hugely important book because it establishes for us the reason why the old way of doing things no longer was any good. Leviticus actually turns out to be a really important book of the Bible because it sets up for us an understanding of the daily grind that the people of Israel were involved in just so that they could be made right with God. And once they were made right with God with all of their sacrifices, well, then they had to start all over again because it didn't last very long at all.

The book of Hebrews lays out for us why Leviticus is important as it serves as a foil, as a direct contrast to what Jesus did for us once and for all because once is enough. We find described to us a shift in the old way of doing things, sacrifices after sacrifices trying really hard to make ourselves right before God with our actions, as opposed to a once for all awesome falling of grace upon us in Jesus. This text in Hebrews is a repeated assurance of pardon, it is as if the author states over and over again: In Jesus Christ you are forgiven, in Jesus Christ you are forgiven, in Jesus Christ, I tell you, you are forgiven. Let's read.

READ

You'll notice on the cover of our bulletin the picture, actually a couple of pictures of a goat. Any idea why we have the goat on our front bulletin cover? No, it isn't to pay homage to the GOAT Tom Brady and his retirement as we gear up for the Super Bowl, not anything to do with that actually, that is a complete coincidence. The goat is there to draw us back to our first Scripture this morning which reminds us how important it was for the people of Israel to be made right before God. You need to remember the context, again, in which we find ourselves.

The people of Israel have left Egypt where they were slaves and Moses has received the commandments from God which included ways in which they were able to prove to God that they loved him and adored him and that He was the only God that they worshipped. This was to be done through sacrifice, specifically, animal sacrifices. So we read about the sin offerings, and the peace offerings, and the other offerings which all involved the shedding of blood and the sacrifice of animals on the altar. The people of Israel had to follow through on these sacrifices in order to please God.

This was all part of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and with Moses and the people of Israel. It was a pivotal part of the relationship that God had with his people. So our reading in Leviticus we read about how the people of Israel were able to have their sins forgiven before God. They were to take a goat and the priest was to lay hands on the goat and this goat was to be let go in the wilderness carrying with him, look at vs. 21 the iniquities, transgressions, sins and then it was to go away into the wilderness and carry with it all of the sins of the people of Israel and in that way they were forgiven of their sins, because there was a scapegoat, that took their sins away. But this had to happen every year, and every year a goat had to be chosen and sent off.

There was a constant state for the people of Israel of ensuring that you were right before God with sacrifices and actions and works and tasks the proved that

you were righteous and that made you righteous. There was no free pass for anyone, you had to follow the rules which include offering sacrifices time after time after time after time. This goat was only one of the sacrifices, there were others, many, many others.

Over time the prophets and others began to get a bit critical of the way this was working, especially in light of the people as they notice that the people were doing what they were supposed to be doing, offering these sacrifices, but then they would go and murder their neighbor, or steal livestock, or commit adultery, but no problem we always have next year to make it all right again. We hear God say in Hosea 6:6 – For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. Then again God says something similar but even more powerful in Micah 6:6-8, let's read that.

These words from Hebrews are actually thought to be taken from Psalm 51:16-17 where even David in the midst of his sins states: . So even before we get to the writer of Hebrews even the prophets and David himself realized that this simply was not sustainable. The people were able to follow the letter of the law, fulfill the covenant as much as was required, and yet it would mean nothing at all in their relationship to God and in their relationship with each other. The limitations of the old covenant became acute and something had to be done. The true purpose of these sacrifices was to provide a temporary forgiveness for the period of the Mosaic Law and prepare for the coming of Christ.

Well, Jesus came, and when he came he brought a covenant that was once and for all, a sacrifice which took place once for all eternity which will never have to be repeated again either by God or by us. Look at vs.10 where we read that Jesus' body was that sacrifice which was presented once and for all and in that sacrifice we have an eternal redemption that does not have to be repeated. The results of this once and for all sacrifice is salvation. Where there is forgiveness in Jesus, there is no longer any sacrifice, no longer any shedding of blood because

Jesus blood was shed. And as Hebrews tells us earlier in chapter 9:22, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

That was true in the Old Testament in the shedding of the blood of the animals which happened over and over again and could never be enough, which was replaced with the one time shedding of the blood of Jesus, one time that was enough, which again provides us with a certain assurance of pardon, that in the name of Jesus we are forgiven.

The distinction that the author is trying to make that is so important for us to hear and understand, is that as we see in vs.11 the priest used to stand day after day offering the sacrifices again and again, but it never really took away sins because once that goat was gone and you sinned, then that sin stuck with you until the goat of next year came along.

Not so with Jesus, he doesn't stand and work, he sits at the right hand of God the Father proclaiming that we are saved by the blood of the lamb and there is nothing that we have to do, there is nothing that we can do to earn or deserve or prove that we have the salvation that is offered to us. As vs.12 states, Jesus offered for all time a single sacrifice of sins. That's all it took.

Now for some of us, we haven't quite understood that and we try to absolve our guilt, even today, by bringing sacrifices in our own life with us repeatedly thinking this is going to help our status before God. We bring the sacrifice of serving as Sunday School teachers or youth advisors, we give ourselves away in sacrifice praying for the sick, we give our sacrifices by speaking out for justice and equality in Jesus' name, we give our sacrifices by coming to church, by tithing, by being the best we can be, which might be nominally better than others.

Over and over we make these sacrifices, but it does not work, it is never enough so we might get discouraged. All of those things that I just mentioned are not necessary in order for us to be in a right relationship with God. None of that helps our relationship with God. It helps the church and it builds the church. But

Jesus already sacrificed for us his life so that we no longer have to suffer and feel as if we owe him one and all of our life we are wondering if we have ever paid him back. That's not a relationship. His once and for all made us perfect once and for all. The old sacrifices might cleanse the surface but people are still left with a guilty conscience. Being made right before God is simply not something we can do on our own, we can't even contribute to it. The law could never make us perfect, only Christ could complete the work of God in us and provide perfect access to him. Christ has promised final forgiveness and eternity is God's gift to us as a result.

Today, we have before us the most powerful proof of Jesus' sacrifice as we see the cup and the bread in front of us. Jesus' once is enough and once is for all sacrifice allows us to approach the table because he makes us worthy. We don't take communion in order to be made right before God. We take communion because through Jesus we have already been made right with God. Glory be to God in the highest, Alleluia.