

“Day of Atonement: Once For All Sin Payment”

Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; Heb. 9-10

In our series, “Behold the Lamb of God”, we’ve been working our way through the Old Testament, stopping at places along the way that help us see why the people who heard and saw Jesus, should have known that He was the Messiah and that they should have understood that He would die for their sins.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he told the people around him in John 1:29

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Today we want to focus a little closer at why the people should have understood Jesus would ‘take away the sin of the world’ because they already had built into their worship framework under the Law not just the sacrificial system in general but a specific day once a year when the sins of the nation were taken away. That day was called the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur.

The Day of Atonement is the second of 3 Fall holy gatherings which all take place within a 3-week period. The first day of the 7th month (mid-September for us) is the Feast of Trumpets. It marked the beginning of Israel’s holiest month has arrived. The trumpet blasts on that day are a declaration for the people of Israel to prepare to meet with God on the 10th day of the 7th month, the Day of Atonement, when God dealt with Israel’s sins. The Trumpet blasts of the shofar called Israel to soon gather together to renew their covenant relationship with God by confessing their sins.

Again, these feasts pointed forward to events Jesus would accomplish because Paul said in Col. 2:16-17

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things to come; the reality however is found in Christ.

What does the Day of Atonement teach us?

Our Need for a Sinless High Priest **(16:1-4, 6, 11)**

The immediate context of Lev. 16 concerns the ability for the High priest to enter the Most Holy Place. Back in Ch. 10, Aaron’s two oldest sons Nadab and Abihu entered the tent of meeting without the proper incense as God prescribed and tried to enter where the Ark of the covenant was. God struck them down with fire from His presence. How then can they enter God’s presence? The Day of Atonement answers that question and then only the High priest.

Since the high priest is only human and sins as well, elaborate preparation is made before he can enter God’s presence.

³ *“This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on.*

He doesn't put on his usual high priest outfit. He comes before God simply with the most basic and minimal clothing, white linen undergarments. Even then he must bathe before putting them on. He himself must be clean

⁶ *“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household.*

This is repeated again in v.11, vv.1-10 giving the overview and vv.11- and following giving more details. In the next Chapter God explains why the shedding of blood is necessary.

^{17:11} *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

Sin results in death; separation from God. Therefore, God requires a sinless death to pay for one's sins. He established this as we saw in the Garden of Eden when He Himself atoned for Adam and Eve's sins with the sacrifice of an animal, giving them the skin to cover themselves.

We will use Hebrews numerous times in order to show us what God was demonstrating by all this. In Hebrews we learn that Jesus is our great High Priest not from the bloodline of Aaron and Moses but rather like Melchizedek who was a king priest of Jerusalem. In Hebrews 9:11-14 we read about how Aaron's inability to be our mediator points forward to the need for Jesus, our sinless high priest.

^{9:11} *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

As we'll see, Aaron and his sons would have to do this every year. And each time needing to cleanse themselves first before they can offer a sacrifice for the people. The repetitive-ness of this pointed out that it wasn't enough.

The system pointed out our need for a sinless high priest

Who Offers Forgiveness and Removal of Sins **(16:5, 7-10, 20-22)**

God was showing by the two goats that He was willing to forgive His people's sins and wanted to assure them by the scapegoat that their sins were gone – at least for a year. V.5 tells us it takes two goats for the sin offering but only one is killed. The details are in v.7

⁷ *Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring*

the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

At this point Aaron makes all the necessary blood sacrifices, cleansing the holy place, the most holy place and the altar where the sacrifices were made. Only now can he approach the live goat.

²¹ He is to lay both 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. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

The sacrificed goat pictures the forgiveness of sins while the live goat pictures the removal of sins. First Aaron must confess the sins of the people. The Day of Atonement covered everyone's sins – especially the ones never confessed – and showed that God in His grace wanted to forgive and have an ongoing relationship with His people. But again, you had to do this the next year and the next year, etc.

Once more we see how the author of Hebrews helps us understand what God wanted His people to see.

^{10:1} The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’ ”

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

¹⁷ Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” ¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

The whole point of all this was so that the people of God would know that they could be forgiven

In Order to Enter God's Presence **(16:12-19)**

Even though it was only through the High Priest that access was available.

16:12 He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. ¹³ He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. ¹⁴ He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

¹⁵ "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. ¹⁶ In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. ¹⁷ No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

¹⁸ "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. ¹⁹ He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

Only now after all this could the people be assured that access to God was available for the year. But then you had to do it again year after year. Not anymore because Jesus our High Priest was the sinless sacrifice offered for us so we could receive forgiveness and know our sins are removed. Back in Heb 10:18 we read,

10:18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

But what's our part in all this? If Jesus is our sinless High Priest who, by His own sacrifice offers us forgiveness of sins and assures us they have been removed as far as east is from the west (Ps. 103:12), now making access into God's presence available at any time since the temple is no longer necessary, is there not something God requires from us to have this?

By Repentance of Our Sin and Faith Alone in God **(16:23-31; 23:26-32)**

23:26 The LORD said to Moses, ²⁷ "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. ²⁸ Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. ²⁹ Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. ³⁰ I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. ³¹ You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. ³² It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

'Deny yourself' or literally 'humble your souls'. There is something we must "do" in order to be forgiven. We must

Humble ourselves before God

'Humble' means to prostrate oneself before God. This is the day you acknowledge you are a sinner and you need a sacrifice if you are to be right with God. The word for soul is 'breaths'. Your very breath. In other words, your entire life.

The Day of Atonement reminded the people that you owed your soul to God. He rescued you from Egypt. He brought you to Himself in the wilderness. He made a way for you to have access to Him but you can only come on His terms.

And you can't do anything to earn this. That's why it was a solemn day. Don't work. Don't do anything because there's nothing you can do to earn salvation and acceptance before God. Humble yourself before God and

Acknowledge your inability to save yourself

All that you could do was believe everything God said was true. If God said He has forgiven your sins then your sins are forgiven. If God says they are removed as far as the east is from the west then they are removed. And all this pointed to the finished work of Jesus, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins – not just of Israel – but of the world. And that requires faith. And if we're continuing in reading Hebrews, what is chapter 11 all about? By faith ... by faith ...

⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The Day of Atonement pointed forward to Jesus the Lamb of God who alone pays for our sin. It also points prophetically forward to the future day as promised in Daniel 9:24 when God will remove the nation of Israel's sins when they repent and finally accept Jesus as their Messiah at the end of the tribulation period.

Practically speaking, the Day of Atonement reminds the people of God that even though Jesus has paid for our sins and removed them, we still need to come to Him for cleansing of current sins in our life. When John wrote 1 John, he was dealing with people who claimed they no longer had sin in their life. He said this:

^{1:8}If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. ²My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We take for granted that Jesus, our Saviour and Lamb of God has taken away our sins. We take it for granted because we don't confess and repent many current sins. We still speak too quickly, too harshly at people and about people. We still don't listen well. We still make little effort to stop ungodly thinking. We still need to humble ourselves before God as an ongoing spiritual discipline to confess current sins and repent (which means completely turn around) of these sins. We don't have to wait once a year. We can come into the throne of grace and find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. Let's do that right now.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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