

March 20, 2022

“What Does It Mean to Be Forgiven?” Leviticus 16

FCF: Our struggle with guilt and need of forgiveness

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The LORD has provided His scapegoat, taking away our sin.
(anchor) We must lay hold of Him that we might be forgiven.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Let’s recall a scene from *The Lion King*. Simba returns to reclaim the throne. But Scar brings up Simba’s past and the responsibility he bears for his father Mufasa’s death. Scar says that Simba’s guilt disqualifies him. And that throws Simba into doubt and nearly undoes him.

John Stott, in his book, *Confess Your Sins*, quotes the head of a large British mental home (READ), “I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness.” Deliverance from guilt by real forgiveness is our deepest need. Think of the memories that keep you awake in the night. And from which you seek relief and distraction in the middle of the day.

What makes it necessary? And what does it mean? What it does it mean to be forgiven? This is vital. And it’s what we’re going to explore in Leviticus 16. Before we read it, let me give you some trail markers. It begins in vv.1-10 with the preparations for the priest to enter the Most Holy Place. In vv.11-28, we read of offerings - the purification, scapegoat, and burnt offering. And in vv.29-34, we have some final additional instructions. What does it mean to be forgiven?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Leviticus 16:1-34](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

A “scapegoat” is defined as “one that bears the blame for others”. An example - “The CEO was made the scapegoat for the company’s failures.” We can trace it to William Tyndale’s translation of “azazel” here in Leviticus 16, a word literally meaning the “goat that goes away”. Scapegoat - it’s an old word and an old concept. And it’s one dearly needed, then and now.

Another word Tyndale coined is “atonement.” We see its meaning by breaking it down – “at-one-ment.” It speaks to our need for salvation and cleansing from sin. Our text is about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the most holy day on Israel’s calendar. The context is alluded to in the opening verses. Its purpose was to address both the danger and defilement of sin.

There is much here on which we could focus. But I want to press into the idea of the scapegoat. This is the only place we find it in the Bible. But it’s mentioned four times. Rightly understood, it is a picture of the work of Jesus. Jesus is the scapegoat. The LORD has provided His scapegoat to take away our sin. We must lay hold of Him that we might be forgiven.

We’re going to look at this from three angles, building as we go. First, the sacrifice of the scapegoat. Second, the promise of the scapegoat. And, third, the fulfillment of the scapegoat.

I. THE SACRIFICE OF THE SCAPEGOAT

So first, what is it that we see in Leviticus 16 regarding the sacrifice of the scapegoat?

A) *The Procedure*

Each year, the sacrificial system given by God to His people reached its climax here on the Day of Atonement. As part of this, two goats were selected, and lots were cast over them.

1. The first goat

The first goat was killed and its blood was sprinkled on and before the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place where God dwelt. That is, upon the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. So the blood was put between the law of God and the sin of the people. The same was done at other places in the tabernacle so as to purge it of sin, making atonement, allowing God to then dwell with them.

2. The second goat

Then there was the second goat, upon whose head the high priest laid his hands and confessed all the people's sin. After which, that goat was led off into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

B) *The Symbolism*

What was all this meant to symbolize, to impress upon the hearts of the people?

1. Propitiation

The death of the first goat pointed towards God's work of propitiation, the removal of His wrath justly due upon their sin and rebellion by the substitutionary death of another, an innocent victim.

2. Expiation

But the second goat pointed towards God's work of expiation, the removal of their sin. The one led to the other. Their sin had been transferred upon another. And that sin had been taken away.

So two things were represented with these two goats - the means of our forgiveness and the results of that forgiveness. God not only forgives sin. He removes it, taking it out of sight.

Application:

Note this is initiated by God Himself, something we alluded to a few weeks ago (**READ Leviticus 17:11**). God not only speaks of the need for atonement but the means as well. And this will become especially important as we get to its fulfillment, the One to whom this is pointing.

But back to the scapegoat. Think of what it would have been like to experience this. You watched the priest slay the first goat. You saw him go into the Tent of Meeting, knowing he is going into the Most Holy Place, to sprinkle that blood upon the mercy seat. You watched as he laid his hands upon this second goat, heard him confess the sins of your people. Then it is led away, never to be seen again. What if that could be true? What if it really could be taken away?

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II. THE PROMISE OF THE SCAPEGOAT

We see this image, this promise of our sin and guilt removed, again and again throughout the Bible. It's a deep need we have that the Lord knows very well. And it's a recurring theme.

A) *Our Sins Removed* (**READ Psalm 103:11-12**)

What of our sin? It has been removed an infinite distance from God and from us.

B) *Our Sins Unmarked* (**READ Psalm 130:3-4**)

What of our sin? The records have been purged. The files have been destroyed.

C) *Our Sins Put Away* (READ Isaiah 38:17)

What of our sin? God has deliberately hidden it, utterly taken it from His sight.

D) *Our Sins Not Remembered* (READ Isaiah 43:25)

What of our sin? It has not been merely pardoned. It has been removed. Not merely forgotten but not remembered. The slate has been wiped clean, broken, and thrown away.

E) *Our Sins Disposed* (READ Micah 7:18-19)

What of our sin? Not just dropped overboard but launched far out into the very deep.

Application:

What do we see here? There is a great eagerness in the heart of God to put away our sins. Corrie ten Boom gladly noted on no few occasions of that text from Micah 7 that after God cast our sins overboard (READ), “(He) put up a sign saying, ‘No fishing allowed.’” Picture that.

We need to take this in hand and let it speak directly to our tendency to drag those sins up, or when others try to drag them up, causing us to live under a vague deadening sense of guilt. Ours is not to be under the overcast clouds of guilt but the clear blue sky of God’s forgiveness.

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III. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SCAPEGOAT

But how is all this possible? We know (and Israel knew) that goats are not going to be the solution. And, of course, they weren’t. They pointed toward the work of the greater Scapegoat.

A) *Accomplished by Jesus*

1. His great work

And that is Jesus. Jesus accomplished all this sin bearing work (READ Hebrews 9:23-26).

2. The promise held forth

Jesus’ sin bearing work is complete. And He now holds forth a promise (READ 1 John 1:8-9).

B) *Appropriated by His people*

So Jesus’ finished work is the means by which we can be freed from our guilt and our shame. But how does it become ours? How is it appropriated? How do we lay hold of it?

1. Repentance

Two things are necessary. The first is repentance. Mourning our sin - not just the consequences to us but the grief we have caused the Lord and others. Mourning it, turning from it, and accepting our helplessness. Giving up on trying to be good enough, on making ourselves right.

2. Faith

Turning from our self-righteousness and to trusting in God’s provision, Jesus’ righteousness - knowing our sin was transferred upon Him, that He has carried it far away to be seen no more.

That is how His work is appropriated. That is how what He accomplished becomes ours.

Application:

There's something else. This is not just for when we first come to Christ. This has to be the way we live each day – in humble trust upon His finished work. In an objective sense, our sin has been dealt with once for all. Those sins were borne away outside the camp. But in a subjective sense, to experience the freedom and joy of this, we need to lay hold of that each day. The newborn takes in that first breath of fresh air. And then keeps right on breathing after that.

This is not a mind game or a pretending we have never sinned. It's a trusting that all our sin has actually been dealt with. So we regard ourselves on that basis, now clean in His sight.

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CONCLUSION:

The Mission is the story of Gabriel, a Jesuit priest, and Mendoza, a mercenary. In 1750, Gabriel is commissioned to build a mission in South America for the Guarani Indians. He meets with Mendoza, slave trader, known all too well by the Guarani. Mendoza has killed his brother in a fight over a woman and is now inconsolable, trapped in a prison of guilt and regret. Gabriel tries to persuade him to come to a village where he has committed so many of his sins ([READ](#)):

Speaking words of hope, Gabriel says, "There is life."

The slave trader counters, "There is no life."

Gabriel says, "There is a way out, Mendoza."

"For me there is no redemption," Mendoza says.

Gabriel responds, "God gave us the burden of freedom. You chose your crime; do you have the courage to choose your penance? Do you dare to do that?"

"There is no penance hard enough for me."

"But do you dare try it?"

"Do I dare? Do you dare to see it fail?"

As they begin the journey, the priest straps a huge sack of armor on Mendoza's back. To reach the village, the men travel over cliffs and waterfalls. What would be perilous for an experienced climber is nearly impossible for someone with a massive sack of armor strapped to his back.

When they reach their destination, the Guarani are excited to see Gabriel. But as they recognize Mendoza, it becomes a moment of truth. One of the men unsheathes a knife and holds it to Mendoza's neck. Mendoza remains calm, prepared to receive the punishment he deserves.

But in an unexpected act of grace, the Guarani removes his knife from Mendoza's neck and cuts free the pack of armor. All watch as it falls from the slave trader's back and clatters down the mountainside into a ravine below. Mendoza, shocked and confused, now begins to sob uncontrollably and clings to the Guarani's feet in contrition. Why? He has tasted forgiveness.

Guilt can crush you. Many of us seem to think that we deal with it by working harder, by a bit more effort. Yet our culture is determined to deny any thought of objective right and wrong and to suppress any notion of sin. The rub is that doesn't work either. More and more attention is being given to what is called "the strange persistence of guilt." That is, we are haunted by the sense that something is wrong, that we have done wrong. But because we've denied the existence of a moral law and a moral lawgiver, we now have nowhere to go with our guilt. So we're stuck. It's a terrible place to be, to have this crushing burden and nowhere to go with it.

But actually, we do. And that is to the One to whom this ancient ritual pointed, to Jesus our Scapegoat, the One who has taken our guilt upon Himself and taken it into the wilderness.

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