

August 5, 2018

“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:

John Stott, in his book, Confess Your Sins, quotes the head of a large British mental home as saying (**READ quote**), “I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness.” That’s not just for that man’s patients. Deliverance from guilt by real forgiveness is our deepest need. Think of the memories of the things we’ve done that keep us awake in the middle of the night. And from which we seek relief and distraction in the middle of the day.

We’ve been looking at forgiveness much these last few weeks. “Why is it necessary?” “What does it look like?” There’s something else. “What does it mean?” Not just “what does it mean to forgive?” but “what it does it mean to be forgiven?” This is vital. For if we can forgive only so far as we have been forgiven, we need to know how much we have been forgiven.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Leviticus 16:1-10, 20-22**

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.” You get an idea of its meaning just by breaking it down – “at-one-ment.” It speaks to the need we have for salvation from sin and its effects. And our need is great – our bondage to sin, the relational rift between us and God, the just wrath of God for our sin. And also the guilt and shame we bear which He has borne away.

Thinking of forgiveness and the biblical images that capture something of all this, none is more memorable than what we see on the Day of Atonement. For the LORD has provided His scapegoat, taking away our sin. Think of the wonder of that. The LORD has provided His scapegoat, taking away our sin. We must then 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 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:

And note this is initiated by God Himself, meant to impress upon His people at least these two things. First, the reality of sin and its danger. And, second, the hope of being cleansed and purified from their sin. And these realities are still with us – our need and His provision.

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II. THE PROMISE OF THE SCAPEGOAT

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application:

What do we see here? There is an 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 threw our sins overboard (READ quote), "Then God put up a sign saying, 'No fishing allowed.'"

Which, of course, is a wonderful idea speaking directly to our tendency to drag those sins up, or allowing others to drag them up, and then living under a vague deadening sense of guilt.

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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 9:23-28](#)).

2. The promise held forth

The sin bearing work is accomplished. And Jesus 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. Humility

Two things are necessary. The first is humility, a true and sincere acknowledgment of our sin.

2. Faith

And that humility is to be coupled with faith. That is, trusting in God's provision, believing that our sin was transferred in full upon Jesus, 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 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.

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:

Here's a recent headline - "Feeling Guilty, Man Pays 44-year-old Ticket" ([READ quote](#)):

In Minersville, Pennsylvania a man [cleared his conscience](#) by paying a 44-year-old parking ticket. The Minersville Police Department received a letter last week with \$5 and a note inside. The return address was "Feeling guilty, Wayward Road, Anytown, Ca."

Police Chief Michael Combs told local news the note said, "Dear PD, I've been carrying this ticket around for 40 plus years. Always intending to pay. Forgive me if I don't give you my info. With respect, Dave."

The fine for the 1974 parking ticket in the eastern Pennsylvania town was \$2. But the person added \$3 for interest. The same ticket today would be \$20.

Obviously, this is somewhat humorous. But it does point to a real problem - our guilt.

What do we do with it? Many of us in the church seem to think that we deal with it by working harder, by more effort. Our culture is determined to deny any thought of objective right

and wrong and to suppress any notion of sin. Well, 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 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 the ancient rituals pointed, to Jesus our scapegoat, the One who has taken our guilt upon Himself and taken it into the wilderness.

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