

February 23, 2005
Midweek Lent Service 2
Leviticus 4:1-3, 22, 27-31; 6:1-7
Pastor Ott

We See Jesus Paying for Our Sins

Have you ever been selected for jury duty? If you have and you sat on a trial, you may have learned that deciding whether someone is guilty or innocent can be a challenge. Sometimes that is still true even when the facts are clear. Sometimes the facts are not in dispute, but it is still a challenging decision to make.

Take the example of Andrea Yates. She drowned her five children. There was never any denial that she did it. Those facts were stated and accepted by all parties involved. But the defense said that she was schizophrenic. That she did this to protect her children from the devil, so she shouldn't be found guilty.

Or take the case of a woman that was reading her mail as she drove her car. She drove through a stop sign and hit someone and someone died. It was accidental. She didn't intend to kill the person. Everyone agreed to that. But is she less guilty?

Or the woman that hit someone and killed them as she was looking at a travel pamphlet that her husband held up for her to read as she was driving—what about her guilt?

Sometimes even as you are deciding guilt or innocence in a trial like that in our country, it is going to be challenging. One of the challenges at times might be that you don't necessarily agree with the law. You might not agree that schizophrenia is a defense that should be considered as to whether or not a person is guilty if they've done something. But you have to go by the law. The law ends up being the final authority in a trial like that. That's how our system is set up.

That's similar to the situation that Moses lays out for us from Leviticus this evening. As he details for us what God commanded in regard to the sin offering and the guilt offering—two aspects of Israel's ceremonial law. We are taught something about how the Lord views these sins. And when we hear what the Lord says, there might be times that we don't necessarily agree with what the Lord says. There are times in our life when we clearly think some sins are worse than others. Usually it is "your sins are worse than mine." That is usually how we look at it, isn't it?

But this evening, we are reminded of some great truths as we dig into and look at these ceremonial laws. You might read through this at home as you are looking at Leviticus and say, "What's this got to do with anything?" But as we look at these ceremonial laws which God gave us for a reason and the more we look at them, the more details we begin to see. And in these shadows, what we see is Jesus. That is the purpose of all of God's ceremonial laws. Jesus is the one who said these are the scriptures that testify about me. And this is what he was talking about—the Old Testament. We see Jesus. And as we consider the sin offering and the guilt offering, we see the key that God built into the ceremonial law to help us understand it. That key is the gospel and the

shedding of blood. These sin offerings and guilt offerings are shadows of Christ. When we look into them, we see Jesus paying for our sin. We see first of all that his blood takes away our wrath and then secondly this evening, we see that his sacrifice pays our debt.

You may have never sat in a courtroom in our country's judicial system. But you have sat in a courtroom. At home did one kid ever kick another kid and immediately the other kid said it was an accident, "I didn't mean it." Maybe you had to preside over that case. In that courtroom in your living room, if it was accidental, you probably just say to them, "Say you're sorry", and then you move on, right? When it is something like that and it is accidental, that kid knows that if they say it was an accident, whether it was or it wasn't, mom or dad are a lot more likely to go easy on them. That's easy to see.

But God addresses that very point in his regulations about the sin offering. Four times in what we read God says that it doesn't matter if you have sinned unintentionally. You have still sinned. The question that God asks is "Did you do it or didn't you?" Excuses and rationalizations don't matter in God's courtroom. God is concerned about guilt or innocence, not rationalizations.

The law of Moses had a lot of different kinds of laws. And the ones we are looking at are ceremonial laws. These aren't laws about whether or not the person would go to jail. These are laws that talk about the person's relationship with God--where they stood in God's courtroom. Every ceremonial law teaches us something about God that goes much deeper than just the ritual that they would go through. That is the problem that God had with the Israelites. They just went through the motions. They didn't understand what they were doing or why they were doing it. He said these people worship me with their mouth, but their hearts are far from me. They didn't focus on the meaning that is behind it. And they ran into problems. The same that can happen to you or I today when we just want to go through the motions and become upset when we have to stop and think as we worship our God.

But what God is trying to teach us today as we look at this shadow of Christ in this ceremonial law, is teaching us how God views our sin. He says we are guilty whether we have sinned on purpose or not—whether it was intentional or unintentional. Whether we recognized it or realized it at the time or not, he says it is sin. When he is talking about their guilt, he is not talking about how they felt about whether or not they were guilty. He is talking about how he feels. And he says they are guilty.

This law tells us how God feels about guilt. He hates our guilt. He hates our sin. He says this sin is going to take something that is going to be inconvenient to the people. It is something to remind them that God hates sin--expensive, inconvenient and time consuming. Time so that they would have to think about what God thinks about sin. The Israelites couldn't pretend that God didn't really care as they went through all of these rituals that God laid out for them when they had sinned unintentionally. They could have been spitting and sputtering the whole time about, "I didn't even know I did it", "I didn't recognize it", "What's the big deal?" But they had to understand that God considered it a big deal.

The four different things that we read about, they all have a little bit different to do. Let's take a closer look at the one when a member of the community sins unintentionally. When he was made aware of his sin, what did he have to do? He had to go find a perfect female goat. He had to obtain it if he didn't have it on his own—purchase it, bring it there to the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and bring it into the courtyard by the big bronze altar that was out in front of the tent of meeting—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Out in front of that in the courtyard was this bronze altar. Take it there to a priest. When you get to the priest, lay your hands on the animal to symbolize that your guilt of your sin, your unintentional sin, the guilt of that sin is being placed on this animal. And then kill it. Drain all of its blood. Collect all of its blood. Then have the priest take his finger, dip it into that blood, and smear it on the horns, the corners of the altars that stood up. It was to communicate that blood is to be shed to pay for sin. Take the rest of the blood that you collected (not a small amount) and pour it out at the base of the altar. What do you think that altar looked like? What do you think it looked like around that altar? And then the priest would take that female goat, cut the fat out of it and place that fat on the altar and burn it up—start a grease fire--which would be a pleasing or soothing aroma to the Lord. And we are told that in this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.

If you guys show up next Sunday and I'm out in the entry way to the church, in the front courtyard there by the sign, starting a grease fire and rubbing blood on things, how long am I going to be here? God doesn't tell us we have to do that anymore. But God is teaching us a very eternal truth that is important for you and I to remember. You know, killing that animal didn't really pay for the sin, did it? If killing an animal could have paid for sin by itself, Jesus would have never had to leave heaven. We would just have to make sure we've got all kinds of goats and rams running around everywhere and just keep killing enough of them and then we will eventually get to heaven. This animal's blood paid for sin only in the sense that it pointed ahead to the Messiah whose blood would be shed to pay for your sins and my sins. Our unintentional sins—the sins we don't even realize we commit. Maybe we are talking to someone in the basement and we say something and we don't think anything of it, but it hurt them. We have sinned against them, and we don't even realize it. And I'll bet we do this every day.

The blood had to be shed to pay for sin. But all of that blood pointed ahead to Jesus' blood who covers each and every one of us. Jesus' hands and his feet were pierced so that he would hang on the cross so that his life and his death would be a soothing aroma in the eyes of the Lord. His blood washes away our sins. We are baptized into his death so that we are forgiven.

This concept is at the core of what you and I believe as Christian's—that Jesus took away our sins. And yet there are a lot of people out there today that think this is horrific, this is savage. I can't believe in a God that would kill his own son to pay for sin. That is barbaric. It's just too often people want to remake God in their own image, what they think God should be. But here God lays it out clearly—blood pays for sin. We can dislike it, but then we miss out on the beauty of the cross. We miss out on how incredible it is that our God loved us enough to do what was not easy as we heard Jesus praying in the Garden this evening. *“May this cup be taken away from me if it is*

possible. But if it is your will, I'll do it." Our God loves us with an intense abiding love. You can see that already as you look at the sin offering in the book of Leviticus.

When it comes to sin offerings and guilt offerings, God asks a simple question. Did you commit it or didn't you? But that doesn't mean that God is not aware of what is going on in our hearts. He knows what is going on in our hearts. And when he talks about the regulations about the guilt offering, then he hits us in our hearts where all too often we find ourselves living. Moses wrote, *"If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do--"*. What God is describing here are not accidental sins. These are deliberate sins. These are the kind of sins that maybe take place in that living room when your brother or sister kicked you and you immediately hit them back, right? You made a choice now. That wasn't an accident. You decided, "I've got to pay them back with a fist, elbow, a slap" or whatever it might have been.

We make those kinds of choices even as we get older, don't we? It is getting to be that time of year when many people are filling out taxes. Do we find ourselves saying, "You know what, Uncle Sam doesn't make the best and the wisest use of this money that I give. So you know what I am going to do? I am just going to fudge on these deductions a little bit because in reality, I can make better use of it than they can." Or maybe we are selling something to someone and we represent one thing with our words, but we write up a contract that has that real little fine print and it says something different. And then we try to sooth ourselves by saying, "Well, it said it in the fine print. If they didn't read it, that's their fault. That's not mine". We made a deliberate choice to do what God says don't do.

When that happened among the Israelites, then they had to carry out God's ceremonial law that dealt with the guilt offering. This truth teaches us a very important lesson. And that is that every sin we commit is a sin against God. We might say "What's the harm. If the person isn't smart enough to pick up on this and see what is happening to them, they don't need the money because they are just going to be a fool with it anyhow". We can make all kinds of excuses about these things. But God says every sin is a sin against him. We might say "Well if two people aren't married and they decide they want to have sex outside of marriage or they want to live together or they want to do this or that, what's the harm?" God says it is sin against him. Every sin is a sin against him. Every deliberate choice that we make, if we aren't glorifying God, we are insulting our God. And the truth of the matter is that you and I insult God more than we would like to.

The guilt offering teaches us that these choices we make to insult God puts us in the hole with God. We owe him a penalty. To erase these sins in God's eyes what a person would have to do in the time of Moses was to first of all make restitution. If you took a sheep, return the sheep. If you found something and said you didn't find it, give it back to the person who had lost it. And then it says you have to do more than just restitution--one-fifth more than the value of that sheep. So if you found five sheep, you better find a sixth one to give back to that person if you lied about it. You have to make restitution.

God demanded one more thing after that. You had to bring him a guilt offering. Not a cheap one either. A perfect ram would have been quite expensive. But you had to bring it because first and foremost your sin was a sin against God.

Again, we aren't obligated to follow this ceremonial law, but there is an eternal truth here. Compensation that we would bring to God is not enough to pay for our sin. We can't pay the debt we owe God. Because no matter how much we would bring to God, we would still owe him more. No one can redeem the life of another. The cost is too great. No ransom is ever enough. This is what the book of Psalms tells us. The only price we could pay to get rid of this debt would be an eternity in hell. That is the only thing that would balance the scales.

This is the amazing thing. The guilt offering was also to teach about the coming Messiah. Isaiah takes the guilt offering and applies it directly and specifically to the coming Messiah. Isaiah says, "*Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.*" The promised Messiah would be a guilt offering. The whole purpose of the guilt offering was so that we would see the picture of someone who would pay the debt that you and I cannot.

This ceremonial law was fine tuning the Israelites' conscience and it should also fine tune ours to see that every sin is a sin against God. And as we go forward in our life, we are going to keep making those choices. Glorify God—insult God. Those are going to be our choices. But when we see how God has taken away our sins, when we see what he has given us in the Messiah, now we want to glorify him. Not only do we want to glorify him, we want to just not go to that person and say "I'm sorry" and then walk away thinking in our mind "I've paid my debt". We want to go the extra mile and work hard. And at times it takes hard work to make the relationship work that we have broken apart by sin. When I hurt someone by my sins, or you have hurt someone by your sins, God doesn't want us just to say "I'm sorry" and say "They better suck it up and accept my apology". He wants us to work at doing it because Christ's love compels us to do this. He has done this. He has paid the debt. So now we want to do what it is that glorifies our God—what it is that rebuilds the things that we have broken.

Maybe you started somewhere along the line reading the Bible at Genesis and you got through Genesis and Exodus and it was pretty interesting. But then you hit some of those books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy—all those laws—and you said "I can't read this anymore". "I don't see how any of this matters." These ceremonial laws matter. There are things that we can see in them. One of the clearest things we see is Jesus Christ.

We may never be in a courtroom deciding someone else's fate. But you and I can rejoice that in God's courtroom our fate has been sealed. Jesus lived in our place—Jesus died in our place. His blood was shed on the cross to cover us. His blood paid the debt. His blood makes us right with God. That is why we don't have to offer all those animal sacrifices anymore. It was offered once for all.