

March 25, 2005
Good Friday
Leviticus 16:2, 3a, 6-17, 20-22
Pastor Ott

We See Jesus Taking Our Place

It's not fair. That's a phrase we learn pretty early on in life, isn't it? When we were told to pick up something that someone else had left lying out, we didn't say it real loud but we certainly thought it—it's not fair. I didn't get it out, why should I have to put it away. Maybe in school someone does something wrong in class and no one says who did it so the whole class gets punished. It's not fair to get punished for what someone else did.

It's not something that just sticks with us when we are young, is it? It's not fair. As we get older, we see things that aren't fair. The company has problems, financial problems and in order to make things look right, one or two people are singled out and let go so the boss can keep his job. We see things like that. Someone is made a scapegoat for all the problems of all the rest of the people and we look at it and say it's not fair. When we are on the outside looking in at that kind of situation we can see it clearly but in a world of evil, unless you are at the point of losing your job, then maybe it's still not fair but maybe we are a little quicker to point the finger and say that maybe it is their fault. Maybe they should be blamed.

This evening we want to consider what you and I have to see as we look at the most unfair event in this world—the crucifixion of our Savior. And to do that, we are going to do what we have been doing all through Lent. We are going to look back in time at some of these regulations that God had given to his Old Testament people. As we look at these regulations and as we look at Jesus' crucifixion through the eyes of the old covenant, we see Jesus again. This evening as we look at the holiday known as Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, we see Jesus in these regulations. We see his crucifixion. We see the most unfair thing possible. What we see in these shadows is that Jesus takes our place. We see Jesus taking our place as he died our death. We see Jesus taking our place as he carried our sins.

When God destroyed the whole world in the flood, he did it because of human sin. The human race had grown so evil that God destroyed all except one family. A child hearing this story once at school said, "That's not fair to all those animals. They didn't do anything wrong." And yet, that's what God did. You wonder what that same child thought as we looked at the worship life of the Old Testament—all the animal sacrifices that were made time after time after time. Because in the animal sacrifices of Yom Kippur we see animals being killed, not for anything they had done, but for the sins of the people. The Israelites sins are what led to these two goats being chosen or a bull being slaughtered and blood being spread all over the Most Holy Place.

As you look especially now at the Day of Atonement, we see Jesus here twice. Because you are seeing two different animals and another group of symbolism as we look at it this evening.

The Day of Atonement really brings together a lot of the different elements that we have been looking at throughout the whole season of Lent. On the Day of Atonement these two goats were to be brought in and they would cast lots. One would be for the Lord, and that one would be put to death. The other would be a scapegoat and all the sins of the people would be placed on it and then it would be sent off into the desert. But before that could even be done, the High Priest had to make himself ready to enter into the Most Holy Place because he couldn't do it any other time of the year except this one day. He could not enter in until that sin offering, that bull, had been made for his sins. Now these weren't his intentional sins or for the fact that he had been a faithless High Priest, or that he had been unfaithful in his work. Remember back when we talked about the sin offering. This offering was for all his unintentional sins, the sins he did not even know that he had committed. Even these made him unworthy of entering into God's presence. If it would have been for intentional sins, God would have had them offering a guilt offering, but God asked them to bring a sin offering.

Before he could enter into God's presence he had to offer the blood to take away the sins to make him right so that he could enter into God's presence, because if he entered into God's presence without doing that, God says he would be struck dead. So there's a bull—blood—taken into the Most Holy Place, in that room with gold and put it on the gold atonement cover and then seven times pour it out, and then he had to do it all again. This time a goat was chosen by lot for the unintentional sins of the people of Israel. And the Lord knows that they, like us, sinned intentionally over and over. But this offering was for the sins that they did not even know that they had committed. This again is a ritual for unintentional sins. God was driving home very deeply the truth of how sinful we as people are and how we can't approach him on our own. We need blood to be shed. That blood would be sprinkled on the gold in the Most Holy Place and God said that in this way he would make atonement from the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins had been. He was to do the same from the Tent of Meeting which was among them in the midst of their uncleanness. God had the priests do this for all of these things because the sins of the people, in God's eyes, contaminated everything that they were using to worship God.

And you would think that God's forgiveness would be stronger than human sin, and of course you would be right, but that also teaches us just how serious sin is. He built into the Day of Atonement another ritual that really drives home the truth that all of this blood which was being shed did actually pay for sin. Because even after the priest did all of these things, he still couldn't have just walked in with the blood. The second thing that points us to our desperate need for a Savior—someone to die our death—is the censer and the incense. Before he came into the Most Holy Place, he had to take this incense. This wasn't a smokeless incense. When this incense was put on the fire, smoke was filled everywhere so he would not see the presence of God because he would be struck dead. Because even this blood didn't take away his sins, it only pictured how his sins would be taken away.

The sacrifices, the incense, the censer—all of these things are pictures of Christ, because no matter how hard you and I try, no matter how devout we strive to be, no matter how we pray with sweat rolling down our faces and our backs, we can't just go

and walk into God's presence. We need a substitute. We need someone else's blood, and that blood that we see in all the blood of the Day of Atonement is the blood of Jesus Christ—the sinless Son of God who left heaven and came to this earth and lived perfectly in our place. He erased our sins.

We are just like God's Old Testament people. We sin again and again and again. The evidence of that is we look at someone else's sin and think to ourselves that they are worse than we are—it's sinful pride raising its ugly head in our own lives. We can say we haven't done the big, gross and terrible sins as others might have done, but our sins condemn us. That's why God did the most unfair thing in history.

God poured out his anger, all of his wrath that our sins deserve, on Jesus Christ. And on that cross he endured the very agony of hell. Not just hell on earth—but hell. He endured the bitterness of God's anger that you and I should have dragged every day through all of eternity. That's unfair. That's unfair that his blood is shed and that his life is extinguished because he was sinless. And yet that is the blood that takes on guilty living. That is the blood that assures us that we are forgiven and that we will never have to face that death—the death of being forsaken by God and enduring the agony of hell because Jesus died our death that we should have endured.

Just to make sure that God's people understood that picture and to make sure that we understand all of this, God had another way of showing us that someone has to take our sins away on the Day of Atonement. That was that other goat, the one that did not die and have his blood sprinkled on the altar. But this one the High Priest would take and place both hands on its head and then it says that he would speak over the scapegoat and confess all the sins the children of Israel had committed. Can you imagine that?

This is what God had commanded. He wanted the people to be confronted with their sins. He didn't want them to be comfortable. He wanted them to be confronted with just how sinful they were. How would you feel if the next time we gathered together for worship, instead of us joining together in the common confession and then hearing the absolution, how would you feel if I spent the next 45 minutes listening to what I consider to be all the sins of our congregation? Do you think I could make it 15 minutes without stomping your feet and walking out the back door? Yet that's what God did for his people. Because he wanted them to understand just how serious sin is. It isn't something to be shrugged off, brushed away, swept under the rug and ignored—it's something that takes blood and blood and blood and then he shows us that someone else has to take it away from us because we can't do it on our own. So he has them act it out with symbolism—speaking all of the sins over that scapegoat and then someone that was set aside for this purpose taking that goat and getting it as far away from those people as he could so the goat couldn't come back.

What's the picture? The picture is Jesus Christ living in our place perfectly and then dying in our place. He was crushed for our iniquities. He was punished for us. By his wounds, we are healed. Because of that God says to us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." That's what Christ did. Christ is the scapegoat that took our sins away from us completely.

You ever had this happen to you? I've had this happen to me every now and then. I'm driving along and all of a sudden out of the blue a conversation I had with someone years ago comes into my mind. Quite often it's not a pleasant memory. I remember things I said that I shouldn't have said. There are things I should have done that I didn't do. Sometimes the memories of these conversations are not pleasant at all. They bring out my shortcomings. They lay in front of me my guilt. And they are not joyful memories.

Did you ever have that happen to you? Those pangs of guilt keep coming back. Do you wish you could get rid of those kinds of things that keep coming back to ruin a nice day—they interrupt something good on the radio. Do you wish you could undo all those sins from the past so that they would keep from flooding back into your mind?

Here's some good news. You don't have to. Jesus did it. Jesus took them all away through his perfect life and the shedding of his blood. They are as far away from you as the east is from the west. They're gone forever. They're gone because of Good Friday.

Good Friday is the day when we mourn over our sins. It's a day that's not like any other day in the life a Christian congregation. It's a day when the church looks different and the sounds are different and the sights are different and we are confronted in our faces with the reality of our sin. Yet it's a day for the greatest good. This is a day when we can see Jesus taking our place, dying our death, carrying our sins away forever.