

The message this morning is **The Day of Atonement**, The Day of Atonement, and I'm going to read chapter 16 of Leviticus which is entitled "The Day of Atonement". I'm going to read the whole chapter because it's important to get the whole sense of the ritual that God ordained for the people of God to perform to atone for their sins for an entire year. So here we go...

[Reading Leviticus 16:1-34]

Wow! Can you imagine if we had to do that? Can you imagine if you have to do that every Sunday? Can you imagine if we had to do it once a year? We don't have to do it once a year! The effort, the specifics, the detail, the clarity that was needed to cleanse the people of their sins before God. I wonder if we did that whether we would have a greater sense of the extent to which our sins impair our relationship with God? But we don't have to do that do it, do we! Grace!

The Day of Atonement – what does Atonement mean? The word "Atonement" literally can be thought to mean "At-One-Ment", returning returning us to at-one-ment with God – a bringing us out of a separation from God and bringing us back together by reinstating friendship, by reconciling us, by returning us to harmonic relationship with God. But this concept of ritual sacrifice is quite alien to the contemporary western mind, and yet it's not that far removed: in fact in Trafalgar Square couple years ago a temple of Ba'al was built. Ba'al was the counterpart to Yahweh: in the ancient near eastern Mesopotamia Ba'al was the god of fertility. Ba'al literally means lord, or master, or owner, of people, and people would sacrifice to Ba'al because they they were seeking fertility, they were seeking a blessing on their enterprises. And Ba'al, with is female counterpart Ashtoreth – they were the two gods with whom they would interact in order to gain this blessing. What on earth is a temple of Ba'al doing in Trafalgar Square? This was in 2016. It's linked to Freemasonry – freemasonry when they build things they still sacrifice to Ba'al: they will put elements of food on the cornerstone of buildings. (We sang about cornerstone this morning: our cornerstone is Christ; for them the cornerstone is still Ba'al, and they will sacrifice to Ba'al and he will bless their enterprise.)

I'm sorry to bring up a difficult subject but this is all a bit difficult this morning: we're talking about blood and sacrifice and so on. But child trafficking, child sacrifice is still something which goes on in the world. There's a charity called ECPAT (E-C-P-A-T). These are some figures they released in 2011 about children that had disappeared or that had been handed over into trafficking and that had been literally disappeared. There was a song that U2 sang a few years ago – well quite a few years ago actually – called "Mothers of the Disappeared" and it was about mothers who had lost their children to child sacrifice. And this is still going on a 2011: ECPAT UK tracked over 400 children – a 100 a year between the years 2007 to 2011 – who were trafficked for use in ritual sacrifice. It's still going on.

And then in religion we have sacrifice, what's called "a region of good works" – that I try and make appointment for my sins by doing good things for people. I'm not a parent, but I'm sure there's a number of parents in the congregation this morning. When your children did anything wrong did it help if they came to you and then offered to do the washing up or clean the car? Or did you just want them to come and say sorry for what they'd done wrong? Good works doesn't get you anywhere – what's needed is repentance.

But in recent times even the cross of Christ has come under attack because of this alien sense of ritual sacrifice in the contemporary western mind. I'm not against feminist theology but in feminist theology the cross of Christ has come to be interpreted as "cosmic child abuse" that God the Father was punishing his son, and that only through the punishing of his son could we be saved and that this is somehow a heinous crime committed against Christ because he was a passive recipient of the suffering. It's not right. It's not right. In the Old Testament we have three kind of concepts of sacrifice:

There is **sacrifice of worship**, where you think of Cain and Abel. And Cain and Abel is an interesting story because when you think about Cain and Abel, Cain came and he gave portions of his harvest, and Abel came and he gave fat portions of his flocks. When you think about the two who gave sacrifices what was wrong with Cain? On the face of it there wasn't much that was wrong with Cain, but there are two different kinds of sacrifice that we make: one is a God serving sacrifice (it's worshipping God) and the other is self-serving sacrifice. And there are two other kinds of sacrifice

One is **appeasement** – by making a sacrifice you try and divert the wrath of a transcendent or superior powerful being, you try and divert it by making an appeasing sacrifice, by offering something to try and gain back favour from that [small-g] god. But it's not the same to make a sacrifice of appeasement – to come before God and to offer something, money into the bags this morning, to try and appease for something you've done in the week. What's much more important is to make a sacrifice of atonement because a sacrifice of appeasement looks to satisfy the desires and the needs of a god, a fickle god – one who would otherwise pour out wrath on us. Whereas a sacrifice of atonement isn't needed by God. A sacrifice of atonement is performed by God, it's provided by God for us: we're the ones who need a sacrifice of atonement because unless we have a sacrifice of atonement we cannot come into God's presence because of our sin. I say again: I wonder if we need to consider more the depths of what sin really is – sin is spiritual pollution.

Think about the things that your eyes see in the week and how that affects your brain, and how those thoughts then affect your soul. Think about the things which you hear, whether it be bad language or aggressive music, or someone shouting, or a scream and how that affects you, how it pollutes your spirit. Sin is rebellion against God. And I don't know about you but it's tough to be in the presence of somebody who's rebelling, openly rebelling, against you. Because they come at you with all kind of vitriol, an almost hatred – it takes hatred and vitriol to rebel against somebody, why else would you do it? You're saying to that person (if you're in rebellion against somebody) I don't care at all for what you stand, I'm going to stand against that, and I'm going to speak out against that. When we sin against God we are in open rebellion against what he stands for, and all the good things which he is in his character and which he wants to bring upon the Earth – that's what we do when we sin: conscious wickedness. There's two kinds of wickedness: there's conscious wickedness and there's unconscious wickedness. It might surprise you to know, there's not much difference between the two. You might say "well, if I'm ignorant of my sin, is it still sin?" Yeah! It's up to you to become conscious of it, but then if you still do it once you become conscious of it, it's still sin. But that's what brings you into rebellion.

When we sin it's impossible for us to come into the presence of God; or it was in the Old Testament. The Day of Atonement – it's called Yom Kippur in the Hebrew; Kippur means atonement and it's to cover. The Hebrew word "kapher" means to cover, or to ransom, or to wipe away, or expunge. When you think of the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, at the end

of the story God makes for them, in their nakedness, he makes them garments of skin to cover their nakedness. There was nothing wrong with their nakedness but for them nakedness meant guilt because they gone against the commandments of God. So he covered their sin. And the Ark, when the Ark was built it was covered with pitch on the outside so that the waters of God's wrath couldn't permeate the Ark, it couldn't come in – it was covered. And the Mercy Seat, in the Day of Atonement, the covering over the Ark where the two angels' wings came together, that was where the blood was sprinkled, of the sacrifice because that was where God's mercy came to cover the sins of the people so that they could enter into his presence, so that Aaron the high priest could enter into his presence on behalf of the people and their sins could be atoned for, for the next year.

And the Old Testament Psalms 32 says this: blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. This was the Old Testament: sins were covered for a year. But for us it's better, the blood speaks a better word: Jesus' blood speaks a better word – for us there is only one Day of Atonement and it happened 2000 years ago at Calvary. This is our day of Atonement.

The sacrifice of Jesus corresponds with the specifics, the details of the ritual sacrifice of the Day of Atonement that we heard earlier on. The simple attire of the priest: the priest didn't come dressed up like a bishop in a prosperity church with his fancy suit and his gold – the priest, the high priest, came wearing slave clothes, simple garments. Jesus came in human likeness, and he came as a servant to make atonement, and he went to the cross as a servant to make atonement. Ritual purity: Jesus came and was tempted as we are yet without sin – he was without sin – that's our ritual purity. A sin offering: God the father made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we could become the righteousness of God, that in Christ we become the righteousness of God. He laid the sins of all of us upon him – every single one of us here today, every single one of our sins was laid upon the head of Jesus Christ – as he hung on the cross at Calvary.

When the sky darkened over for three hours and Jesus suffered the sins of us all, every single one of our sins was laid upon his head and he bore them, and when he died he took them to Hades and he returned them from whence they came, to the one who sent them to try and separate us from God. And he took them back and he said to Satan “Have every one of these sins back – they count no longer against my people. They are done – none of them can be held against my people any more. I've paid price.” That's what he meant when he said “It's done!” Is it done this morning, our sins paid for this morning? Yes, why? Because they were laid upon Christ: he is the scapegoat that was sent into the wilderness. The desert in the Old Testament was the place of demons. It was Hell, it was Hades, it was. And that was where Jesus took our sins and he left them there to no longer count against us. When we come in to church every morning we don't have to conduct the Day of Atonement because it's done. But we shouldn't take it for granted because a price was paid and that price hurt Jesus, and it would do us well to remember.

Have you read the book of Hebrews? It's the most wonderful book, it's the link between the two testaments: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Hebrews 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's not man-made – that's in the heaven. The temple that was made on the earth that we read about this morning is a pattern of something which is in heaven. Jesus went through the tabernacle in heaven and he didn't enter by means of the blood of goats and calves. God doesn't hate goats and calves, God never wanted blood sacrifice – he desired mercy not sacrifice, but the people didn't want to do mercy so there had to be blood, but there doesn't have to be blood any more because Jesus entered by his own blood and he obtained eternal redemption

once and for all. Is that good news? It's good news: Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins and then he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. By a single offering he perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Who are those who are being sanctified? Raise your hand! Are you being sanctified? Why are you being sanctified? Because of the blood of Jesus! If you're not being sanctified, if there's any kind of waiting that's going on this morning, if we're still asking for more from God is it because he hasn't done enough? It's not, is it? It's because we haven't laid hold of what he's done already. Why is he still waiting for his enemies to be made a footstool for his feet? Because we haven't laid hold of it yet. It's on us now. We can come into the presence of God and say "God give us more" but has he done it? Yes he has! So where's the more coming from? It's coming from us. The more is on us.

Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. Where there is remission of these there is no longer an offering for sin. It's done. Folks, it's done. We don't need to be held down by sin any more. Our sins have been paid for, our sins have been atoned for. It's done. We can rise, we can rise up, we can rise above them. We can walk tall. We can push out our chests and we can say my sins have been paid, my sins have been atoned for, I'm the righteousness of God in Christ because of what Jesus has done. And we can take that message to the world and we can show them the righteousness of God. And it's up to us to do it, especially now, especially with what's going on in Ukraine. Evil hasn't changed - there's nothing new under the sun. Evil's the same 70 years ago when Hitler stormed into eastern Europe, it's the same devil that's still storming into eastern Europe today, and why is he still getting away with it? Because the people of God haven't taken hold of their inheritance yet. We haven't taken hold of our inheritance yet. We are the righteousness of God in Christ. Amen! Hallelujah!

Christian responsibility. You've heard of cost of living, I'm going to talk about the cost of loving. If we believe in the priesthood of all believers, and do we believe in the priesthood of all believers: is every single person sitting here today a priest and a minister of reconciliation of the gospel? Raise your hand if you're a minister of reconciliation of the gospel...thank you! If we believe in the priesthood of all believers and that therefore we are all priests, we have to acknowledge our responsibility, and our duty, and our privilege, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. And if the whole animal was sacrificed in the Old Testament, and if our bodies are now living sacrifices, what right do we have to portion any part of our life off from being given aside for the gospel of Christ? Is any part of your life spared the responsibility of being given to the gospel? I'm serious!

Is your work unrelated to the gospel. Is any single breath that you take ever, unrelated to the gospel of Christ, and if it is might I suggest that your responsibility extends a little further than that. And until we're prepared to offer ourselves fully and entirely, Jesus is still going to be waiting for his enemies to be made a footstool for his feet. It's not him who hasn't done enough, people. Your private life, your personal life, your public life are all 100%, or should all 100% be, committed to the Gospel of Christ. Because he didn't withhold anything.

And finally if we truly believe there's no other remedy for sin in this world than the blood of Christ, then how devoid of mercy, and of loving kindness, to our fellow human beings what would be if we withheld that message? It's a cost of loving. Be bold. Be brave. Be prepared to be bullied and beaten, berated, banished but don't hold back. Never ever hold back. Am I wrong? I'm not wrong. And it's not my opinion. I'm not giving you my opinion this morning, my opinion counts zero this morning. I've given you the gospel. Amen