

Forgiveness through the Lamb (third in a 5 part series on the Lamb) by David Foster

A few weeks ago we looked at John's vision in Revelation portraying the final outcome of the war between the ancient serpent and the virgin born Messiah, who is, in fact, the Lamb of God. We asked, "How can a meek creature like a lamb overpower a fierce dragon?" Somehow, the answer relates to the Lamb being "slain" and his followers overcoming the dragon, (that is the Devil) by the "blood" of the Lamb. We also looked at Christ's statement about the Devil, who is also called "ruler of this world", being cast out and judged. We saw this as part and parcel of a prophecy where Jesus compares himself to a seed buried in the ground which sprouts and finally produces a large crop.

We began exploring the concept of lamb in the first book of the Bible which tells the epic story of Abraham's sacrifice. He declares that God himself will provide a lamb. The following week we looked at the story of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt. We saw how sacrificing a lamb in the place of their first born son was the turning point of this drama. As with Abraham, so too in this case, sacrificing the first born son was not a brilliant tactical move conceived by Moses. It was God who gave this command. Clearly, offering a sacrificial lamb was NOT a charitable act or a "good deed". All the meat from the animal had to be eaten by each family. There was nothing left over to give away. Therefore, one could not deserve or earn a reward. The focus of this whole event was on the LORD providing a way of escape for the Israelites. The honor and glory goes to God alone.

Today we will examine what Moses taught about how to be forgiven whenever one of God's laws is broken. We already noted that the Passover story did not explicitly address the matter of cleansing from sin and defilement, but this did not imply the Israelites were innocent. The fact is, like everyone else, they too were sinners. Ritual regulations for how to atone for sin and uncleanness were provided some time after the Israelites had left Egypt. Some of these instructions were recorded in Leviticus 4:27-5:6. Let us read them now.

27 "If any member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, when they realize their guilt 28 and the sin they have committed becomes known, they must bring as their offering for the sin they committed a female goat without defect. 29 They are to lay their hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. 30 Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 31 They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.

32 "If someone brings a lamb as their sin offering, they are to bring a female without defect. 33 They are to lay their hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. 34 Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 35 They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.

1 "If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.

2 “If anyone becomes aware that they are guilty—if they unwittingly touch anything ceremonially unclean (whether the carcass of an unclean animal, wild or domestic, or of any unclean creature that moves along the ground) and they are unaware that they have become unclean, but then they come to realize their guilt; 3 or if they touch human uncleanness (anything that would make them unclean) even though they are unaware of it, but then they learn of it and realize their guilt; 4 or if anyone thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil (in any matter one might carelessly swear about) even though they are unaware of it, but then they learn of it and realize their guilt— 5 when anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned. 6 As a penalty for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin.

7 “Anyone who cannot afford a lamb is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for their sin”

As we reflect on this passage let us not forget how the stories of Abraham and Moses highlighted a sacrificial “lamb.” Another similarity to bear in mind is the instructions given to wrongdoers. They were to sacrifice **a goat or a lamb** as an offering to atone for their sin. These animals – goats and lambs – are the same options God provided when the death angel was about to strike Egypt.

We will continue using the same four questions we previously asked to explore and better understand sin offerings.

1. What does this teach us about God? Whoever breaks the law of God offends him and incurs the death penalty, as revealed to Adam: disobedience results in death. On the other hand, God is not quick to execute judgment. In mercy he provides a suitable animal to die in our place as our ransom. Notice the important act of putting one's hand on the sacrificial animal, indicating identification with the lamb who is about to be killed in our place. (Lev. 4:29)

Last week we saw the principle of a lamb dying in the place of an eldest son. However, there are other Mosaic regulations which underscore the basic principle behind putting blood on doorposts, namely, blood signifies life. For example, the Lord said in Leviticus 17:11; “I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. For **the life of a creature is in the blood**, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.” This was the reason why Israelites and resident foreigners were not allowed to eat the meat of an animal without first draining its blood.” (bold font added)

2. What does this passage teach us about ourselves / people? As human beings we are prone to wander off the path and commit sin. Accordingly, we need to be cleansed and reconciled to God and each other.

3. What do you need to apply / obey? Am I alert to wrong doing? Is my conscience sensitive to things that offend God, whether by thought, words or actions? Do I tend to make excuses when I fail to do the good things that I know I ought to do? Let us humbly ask the Lord to reveal things in us that are displeasing to God. Let us pause and reflect whether we feel a prick in our conscience indicating there is something we should confess. Then let us accept God's forgiveness which he gives so willingly and graciously. Is there anyone I need to approach in order to make reparation/restitution and thus be properly reconciled? (Leviticus 6:1-7)

4. Who are you going to tell? When I first read chapter five verse one I thought of a court room

scenario involving a prosecutor who requires evidence to convict a criminal. In such circumstances, it is wrong if we fail to speak up. As Scripture says, “When someone ... has seen, heard, or known about something he has witnessed, and did not respond to a public call to testify, he is responsible for his sin.” (Lev. 5:1)

However, as I thought more about this I realized there is more to it than meets the eye. What if I know and experience something good and wonderful yet I hold back from telling others, is this wrong? And what if the good, wonderful thing I'm withholding is something God wants me to declare?

One example is found in Psalm 107 which begins like this: “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe...”

The rest of the Psalm unfolds with a series of stories, each one illustrating how God “redeemed” or rescued people in various situations. Each paragraph or “stanza” concludes with a fitting refrain, “Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds...” The refrain is repeated 4 times through the Psalm.

As I meditated on this chapter I realized the Psalmist was giving a **public** call to testify, not unlike the circumstance mentioned in Leviticus 5:1, where someone “has seen, heard, or known about something he has witnessed, and [yet] did not respond to a **public** call to testify, he is responsible for his sin.” (HCSB)

Notice, after the final refrain we read, “Let them exalt him in the **assembly** of the people...” (Psalm 107:32) Similarly Psalm 40:9-10 says, “I proclaim your saving acts in the great **assembly**; I do not seal my lips, LORD, as you know. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great **assembly**.” Listen to how the New Living Translation renders these verses, “I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power. I have told everyone in the great **assembly** of your unfailing love and faithfulness.”

Of course, the size of the group to whom we testify is not the main concern. Look at the man from the Gadarenes whom Jesus released from the grip of a legion of demons. We read how Christ was about to return across the lake and the man who was cured asked if he could come with Jesus but Christ said,

“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (Mark 5:19-20)

It is no exaggeration to say Jesus “called him to testify.” Moreover, Jesus called him publicly in the presence of his disciples. Exactly who did he tell the story of how Jesus transformed him? We're not told precisely, but presumably he began sharing with his family, relatives and friends. Possibly he was even given the opportunity of testifying to a larger group in the synagogue.

As we conclude this message give serious consideration to this question, “Will I share my story of how Jesus redeemed and rescued me?” Who will I tell this week?

Appendix: For further meditation let us read a Messianic prophecy: Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (NLT)

13 See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted. 14 But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man. 15 And he will startle many nations. Kings will stand speechless in his presence. For they will see what they had not been told; they will understand what they had not heard about.

1 Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm? 2 My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. 3 He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

7 He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8 Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. 9 He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

10 But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands. 11 When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied.

And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. 12 I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels.

I suggest that we begin our reflection by noting two closely related phrases; “like a lamb” (v. 7) and “offering for sin” (v. 10). How do these concepts connect with the Scriptures we read earlier highlighting sacrificial lambs?

Isaiah 53 does not explicitly use the term “redeem” which recurs frequently in the writings of Moses yet “redemption” is strongly implied. Explain how.

Students of Scripture have long recognized Isaiah 53 as pointing to the Messiah. What does it mean that the Lord's servant will receive the “honors of a victorious soldier?” (v. 12)

A fitting way to conclude meditating on Christ's triumph over death is to sing the magnificent hymn “Thine be the glory.” https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt&hspart=adk&p=video+thine+be+the+glory+albert+hall#id=2&vid=fd8da25eaaa6f0e5279ff7790730c1c7&action=click

Another hymn of praise exalting our victorious Lord Jesus is, “Christ the Lord is risen today:” https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt&hspart=adk&p=christ+the+lord+is+risen+royal+albert+hall#id=2&vid=1dda4b59ded90dd66cc64290c0d13520&action=click