

Good Friday
April 2, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Leviticus 16

The Road to Redemption: From Pardon to Pardon

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Day of Atonement was a very important day in the religious life of the people of Israel. All of Leviticus 16 is dedicated to this day. Chapter 16 is in the middle of Leviticus and that is where Hebrew often puts the most important part of the book. Everything in Leviticus centers on the Day of Atonement. The day is filled with blood sacrifices. The high priest himself offers most of these and sprinkles the blood of the sacrifice many times in many places. He sprinkles blood in the Most Holy Place on the cover of the ark of the covenant to atone for sins for himself, for his family, for the rest of the priests and for all the people. He sprinkles blood on the altar and the corners of the altar. This is a bloody day and it demonstrates the truth of what the author of Hebrews in the New Testament says: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

We can easily see the connection between those blood sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ on Good Friday. Maybe on a different Good Friday we will examine these connections more. However, today we will focus on the one sacrifice that was not really a sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. There was one goat that was not sacrificed at the tabernacle or temple. Yet, through the actions connected with this living goat, the people were assured of their pardon before God. This scapegoat is a clear picture of what Jesus does for us on Good Friday to guarantee our pardon before God. Hear the word of God from Leviticus 16, selected portions about the scapegoat:

Leviticus 16:7-10, 20-22 (EHV)

He shall take the two male goats and stand them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Aaron is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot marked “for the Lord” and the other lot marked “for the scapegoat.” Aaron shall bring forward the goat that received the lot “for the Lord,” to prepare it as a sin offering, but the goat that received the lot marked “for the scapegoat” is to be kept alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it in order to send it off into the wilderness as the scapegoat...

When he has finished making atonement to cleanse the sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay his two hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the guilt of the people of Israel and all their rebellions and all their sins. He is to put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness in the custody of an appointed man. So the goat will carry all their guilt on itself to a remote, desolate place, and the man will send the goat away into the wilderness.

Your Sins Put Jesus on the Cross

Good Friday worship can be difficult for many believers. Some of you here might be waiting for the preacher to say, “Your sins put Jesus on the cross.” That is not comfortable to think about and yet it is true. There would have been no reason for Jesus Christ to die if we had not sinned. The cross reminds us of the penalty for sin and can turn into a source of guilt in our life. We remember tonight all that Jesus suffered from his arrest to his final breath. The purpose is not to make us wallow in our guilt. Instead, God wants us to confess our sins to him so that our guilt, rebellions and sins do not remain on us.

Aaron and the high priests would chose by lot the goat to live and the goat to die in front of the

people. This was at the entrance to the tabernacle so many could witness it. While the high priest went into the Holy Place and Most Holy Place to burn incense, offer prayers and sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial goat, the scapegoat remained outside in view of the people. When the high priest returned, he placed both hands on the head of the living goat and confessed the guilt, rebellions and sins of the people. God uses three different words for the sins to be confessed upon the head of the scapegoat. We confess these same kinds of sin.

The first is guilt, sometimes translated as iniquity. This is the punishment we deserve because of our disobedience. This is knowing that something bad is going to happen to you because of the way you treated that family member or the lie you told. It is going to catch up to me. I deserve something to happen to me and I'm going to be nervous and anxious and feel bad until it does. We all confess our guilt before God.

The second is rebellion, often translated as transgression. We know where the line is but we end up on the wrong side of the line. Maybe it is unintentional. We may not intend to speed on the highway but we get distracted and end up way over the limit. You may intend to only have one drink but end up getting drunk. You may not intend to get angry when you are in a conversation but end up saying something foolish and destructive. Sure, if we were paying attention, we would not have rebelled against God's commands, but we unintentionally rebelled. Of course, there are also times when we know exactly where the line is and deliberately cross it. We all confess our rebellion against God.

The third is the most common word for sin. It has the basic idea of missing the mark. The archer aims at the center of the target but hits the outer ring if he hits the target at all. We know God's law and we want to obey. However, we have a corrupt and sinful nature in us that throws off our aim. We want to do good and evil is right there with us to corrupt even our best efforts. God demands perfect obedience to his commands. Hit the bulls eye every time. Sin is so frustrating for us because even if we are aiming at the right target, we can't hit the bulls eye. We all confess our sins against the Lord our God.

When the high priest confessed the guilt, rebellions and sin of the people upon the head of the scapegoat, it was not to make the people more sorry for their sins or make them feel more guilty. It was God's way of showing them what he does with their sins, rebellions and guilt. So also with us. God shows us through the scapegoat and then through Christ what he has done with our guilt, rebellions and sin. Your sins are on Jesus on the cross.

Your Sins Are On Jesus on the Cross

Then Aaron shall lay his two hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the guilt of the people of Israel and all their rebellions and all their sins. He is to put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness in the custody of an appointed man. So the goat will carry all their guilt on itself to a remote, desolate place, and the man will send the goat away into the wilderness.

The living goat carries the sins of the people into the wilderness and does not return. The people listened as their sins were put on the scapegoat. They watched as the goat was led away. They watched until the scapegoat disappeared from their sight and along with it their sins. I can almost see the people watching the scapegoat going away and everyone letting out a collective sigh of relief. God has really pardoned us! My sins are sent away!

They were truly pardoned because God promised to pardon them through the special ceremonies on the Day of Atonement. The sending away of the scapegoat took their sins away because God promised pardon. How much more does Christ take away sins. For the scapegoat is a shadow. Christ is the reality. Sins were symbolically placed on the head of the scapegoat. Christ truly bore

the sins of all upon the cross. In Isaiah 53 the same three words for sin are used. But in Isaiah we see how all of them are taken from us and put upon Christ.

So where is your guilt? What punishment should you expect from the Lord? Isaiah answers clearly: “The Lord has charged all our guilt to him” (Isaiah 53:6). Your guilt is on Jesus on the cross. Your guilt is not longer yours. It is not on you. It has been taken by Jesus. Just as the scapegoat was led away from the temple, Jesus was taken outside of Jerusalem to the place of crucifixion. Watch him take your guilt away never to return it to you. You can’t have it back. Jesus took it for you.

And what about your rebellion, your transgressions against God’s commands? Isaiah tells us: “He was pierced for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5, NIV). Watch as the soldiers pierce Christ’s hands and feet and side. See that our scapegoat took all the punishment due for our rebellion against God. He did not leave any transgressions for us to pay. You are pardoned by Christ.

And then there are all of those regular, old, evil sins. What about those sins that torment us every day? Jesus took all of those away too. Again Isaiah tells us in chapter 53, “He himself carried the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). Watch Jesus carry your sins in the Garden of Gethsemane and all the way to Golgatha and let out a sigh of relief. For your sins are not on you. God has granted you a full pardon from all guilt, rebellions and sin. Jesus Christ bore all to the cross.

On Good Friday, we do see our sins and are led to confess them just as the high priest confessed the sins of the people on the scapegoat. But be sure you leave tonight with the same picture the people saw when the scapegoat walked away. Their sins disappeared into the wilderness. So don’t take your sins home with you. Jesus has taken them from you and pardoned you. Therefore we go in peace and await the day of resurrection.

Amen.