

Atonement Accomplished

Leviticus 16:1-34, Hebrews 9:1-7, Hebrews 9:11-12, Hebrews 10:19-22, Hebrews 13:11-12

Slide 1

As we begin, I want to read a few verses from both Leviticus and Hebrews to lay the groundwork for our focus this morning.

Leviticus 16:1-10, “The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.”

“This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.”

Now turn to Hebrews 9.

Hebrews 9:1-7, *“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant.*

This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”

Now skip down to verses 11–12:

“But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.”

Think about this. Most anytime you wear a white shirt or blouse, you end up dribbling food or drink down the front of it. You know what I’m talking about.

Now imagine a stain, not just any stain, but a deep, indelible mark on a cushion of your couch or your carpet that stands out like a sore thumb.

Even though you’ve tried to scrub it out and poured every cleaner you could think of over it nothing worked.

Eventually, you're left wondering how to hide it, i.e. flipping the cushion, rearranging the furniture to cover over the stained carpet. You do whatever it takes to keep that stain from being seen.

We've all got stains like that. We have marks we can't remove no matter how hard we scrub, mistakes we desperately try to hide.

In our fear of being exposed, we "flip the cushion" and hope no one sees what's really underneath.

As we consider Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement, we're going to confront the reality of our sin, the stains we can't cover, and see how God doesn't "flip the cushion" to hide our mess.

Instead, He provides a perfect solution to cleanse us completely, and that's the heart of today's message.

The Day of Atonement was a day of reckoning for the people of Israel, a moment when their sinfulness was exposed and atonement was made.

Atonement is something you do to show that you are sorry for something bad that you did. Biblically, it is the reconciliation of God and humankind through Jesus Christ.

But as powerful as that ritual was, it was insufficient. It pointed forward to something far greater: the perfect atonement accomplished by Jesus.

Jesus is the perfect atonement, forever reconciling us to God. Unlike the old system that only covered sin temporarily, Jesus' sacrifice removed the stain completely.

Slide 2

As we saw earlier, Leviticus 16 opens with a sobering reminder that God's holiness is not to be taken lightly. It starts with a tragic story that sets the stage for the Day of Atonement.

At the beginning, God reminds Moses about the death of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu.

These young priests dared to approach God on their own terms, offering "unauthorized" or "strange" fire before the Lord, and in doing so, paid for it with their lives.

They died because they disrespected the holiness of God. Leviticus 10:2 *"So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord."*

God's holiness requires atonement. In Leviticus 16, God made it clear to Moses that Aaron couldn't just walk into the Holy of Holies whenever he chose. The cost of sin was too high.

God's holiness demanded respect, and sinful humanity can't stand in His presence unprepared.

Understand, this isn't about God being harsh; it's about God being holy, and a holy God demands a holy people.

Let's be honest, holiness isn't a popular concept today. Our culture tends to treat God like a casual friend or a comforting presence Who overlooks our faults.

But Leviticus confronts us with the reality that our sin isn't just a passing mistake, it's a deep offense against a holy God. The cost of sin is severe because sin separates us from God.

Some believe that this whole ritual was just about rules and regulations, but it wasn't. It was about acknowledging the seriousness of sin and recognizing that we can't approach God on our own terms.

We're not the ones who set the standard, He is, and His standard is holiness. Atonement is required by holiness and is repeated by necessity.

This is why God established the Day of Atonement as an annual practice. Leviticus 16:34 tells us, *"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."*

But the sacrifices offered were never truly sufficient to fully atone for sin. They only provided a temporary covering.

Year after year, the high priest had to offer the same sacrifices for himself and the people; repeating the same rituals because the stain of sin was never fully removed.

This was a stark reminder that the law couldn't accomplish permanent cleansing.

The best the law could do was to cover sin for a time, pointing forward to the day when a perfect and final atonement would be made.

Think about how exhausting that must have been, constantly returning to the same rituals, never experiencing true freedom from guilt. If we're honest, we could fall into that same pattern today.

Even though we're not offering animal sacrifices today, we try to atone for our own guilt in other ways, by working harder, doing more, trying to be better, convincing ourselves that our good deeds will somehow outweigh our failures, but all of it falls short.

The limit of the law, the insufficiency of our works reveals that human effort and ritual can never truly deal with the problem of sin.

Seeing the need for atonement, now let's consider the means of atonement.

Slide 3

The Day of Atonement didn't just highlight our need for atonement; it pointed to the means by which atonement would be accomplished.

God didn't leave His people with an impossible standard and no solution. Instead, He established a way for sinful people to be reconciled to Him.

The heart of that reconciliation is centered on two key elements: the sacrifice and the scapegoat.

The high priest would take the blood of the sacrificial animal inside the veil, into the heart of the Holy of Holies, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat.

This wasn't just a ritualistic gesture, it was a vivid declaration that atonement could only be made through the shedding of blood.

Leviticus 16:15–19 shows, in great detail, how the blood was applied to purify the sanctuary and atone for the sins of the people.

This wasn't just about cleansing the physical body; it symbolized the cleansing of their hearts and lives.

Hebrews 9:22 tells us that *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,”* but in the very next chapter of Hebrews we read that the blood of bulls and goats could never truly remove sin.

For me, this reality makes Hebrews 9:11–12 that much more powerful! When Christ, our great High Priest, entered the Holy of Holies, He didn't enter with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood, securing eternal redemption.

Think about that contrast for a moment. What the high priest did year after year, Jesus did once for all.

The Old Covenant system never gave lasting peace, but Jesus' sacrifice on the cross accomplished what no amount of animal blood could ever achieve. It wasn't temporary cleansing, it was eternal redemption.

This is where we need to let that truth sink in: the blood of Jesus was sufficient to pay for every sin—past, present, and future.

Hebrews 10:12 tells us that Jesus “...*offered for all time one sacrifice for sins.*” If we're in Christ, we no longer have to carry the guilt and shame of our failures because His sacrifice has cleansed us completely.

Maybe today you're weighed down by the feeling that you just can't get clean; that no matter how hard you try, your mistakes still define you.

Let me remind you: the cross declares that you can be fully forgiven and completely cleansed. You don't have to keep trying to “make up for” your past. Jesus has done it all.

In Jesus, we see the sacrifice that cleanses our sin, but we also see the scapegoat that carries our sin away.

Slide 4

Once the High Priest had made atonement with the blood of the sacrifice, he'd take a live goat, known as the scapegoat, and lay both hands on its head, confessing over it all the sins of the people.

Then the goat was led away into the wilderness, carrying with it the weight of their guilt and rebellion, where it was banished, never to return.

Can you imagine how that must have felt? Watching the scapegoat disappear over the horizon, knowing it carried the guilt of the entire community.

It was a powerful picture, a symbol that God was removing their sin and sending it far away.

This powerful image was just a shadow of what was to come. Jesus, our ultimate scapegoat, fulfilled this picture perfectly; not just by bearing our sin, but by becoming sin on our behalf.

Isaiah 53:6 prophesied of Jesus, saying, “...*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” 2 Corinthians 5:21 declares, “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf...*”

1 Peter 2:24, “*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...*” Jesus took our guilt, He bore our shame, and He carried it far away.

Hebrews 13:11–12, “*The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.*”

Just as the carcasses of the sin offering were burned outside the camp, Jesus was crucified outside the city.

Just as the scapegoat was led outside of the camp carrying the sin of the people, “*Jesus also suffered outside the city gate*” bearing not only the weight of our sin but also the curse and shame that came with it.

He became the sin-bearer and the outcast, taking upon Himself the full consequence of our rebellion.

Maybe you feel like your sins are still hanging over you, like you're marked by the stain of your past.

But the beauty of the Gospel is that, if you're in Christ, Jesus took your sin and bore it outside the camp. It's gone. It's finished. It doesn't define you anymore. Stop trying to carry what Christ has already taken away.

When we look at both the sacrifice and the scapegoat, we see the complete picture of how God dealt with sin through the Day of Atonement and ultimately through Christ.

He doesn't just cover our sin, He removes it. He didn't just purify the sanctuary; He purifies our souls.

The Day of Atonement was always pointing forward to the One who would do what the blood of animals could never do. Now let's look at the result of atonement.

Slide 5

Hebrews 10:19-22, *"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."*

Because of Christ's atonement, everything changes. It doesn't just remove our guilt, it opens the door to something far greater.

We're invited into a new relationship with God, one that's grounded in a powerful reality: In Christ, we receive access through His blood.

When Jesus cried out on the cross, "*It is finished!*" and breathed His last, something extraordinary happened in the temple.

Mark 15:38, "*The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*"

The veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, the barrier that kept sinful humanity from entering the presence of a holy God, was torn apart by God Himself.

Under the Levitical Law, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and only then with the blood of a spotless sacrifice. The people could never truly come near the presence of God.

But now, because of Christ's perfect sacrifice, Hebrews 10:19 proclaims that "*we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.*" Confidence, not fear. Boldness, not hesitation.

Let that sink in. What was once inaccessible to all but one man once a year is now open to everyone who believes in Christ.

The veil has been torn, and our hearts have been sprinkled clean. Because of the blood of Jesus, we don't have to cower in guilt or shrink back in shame.

We don't approach God on the basis of our worthiness but on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

And because of that, we draw near to God with full assurance of faith. Not with trembling uncertainty or anxious hesitation, but with a boldness rooted in the finished work of Christ.

We are welcomed into the presence of God, not because of anything we've done but because of what He has done for us through the blood of Jesus.

Maybe today you're still living as if the veil is intact; as if access to God's presence is still reserved for someone holier or more worthy, but Scripture declares that the way has been opened.

You don't have to earn your way in or prove yourself worthy. Jesus has made a way for you to come freely and confidently into the presence of the Father.

If you feel unworthy, good. That's the point. None of us are worthy, but He is. Because He gave His life for ours, we can come boldly before God's throne. We have access through the blood of Jesus.

Slide 6

Conclusion

Hebrews 10:14 declares, *"For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."*

One offering. Not a continuous cycle of sacrifices, not an endless ritual of penance and payment, one offering.

What does it mean that He has *"made perfect forever"* those who are being sanctified? It means that in the eyes of God, our sin has been completely dealt with.

In Christ, we're no longer seen as guilty rebels but as forgiven sons and daughters. We're perfected.

Not because we live perfectly, but because the perfect Lamb of God took our place. Jesus is the perfect atonement, forever reconciling us to God.

This assurance means that our salvation doesn't rest on our performance but on His perfection. It means that we don't have to wonder whether we've done enough because Jesus did everything necessary.

Maybe you've carried that stain of guilt and shame for so long that you've stopped believing it could ever come clean.

You've tried scrubbing it away with good works, with religious rituals, with promises to do better, but the stain is still there, still haunting you. Still reminding you of your failures.

Well, I want you to know this morning that Jesus didn't just come to cover the stain. He came to remove it. He came to wash you completely clean.

He came to take that permanent mark of sin and erase it forever through His own blood.

This is what the Lord says Isaiah 1:18, *"...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*

Today, you don't have to live marked by guilt or shame anymore. You don't have to wear that stain. You don't have to keep trying to clean up what only the blood of Jesus can wash away.

Instead, rest in His finished work and let Him make you new.