

Join me in our walk this week. As we place our feet in the footprints of our Messiah, they lead to the temple. Ten days ago on the Feast of Trumpets we were called by the shofar. Through these past Days of Awe we have prepared for this day: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. For this festival, another of God's "lasting ordinances for the generations to come," the faithful assemble at the temple and fast.

If we go back in time to Jesus' day, our road has led to the city gates of Jerusalem. Ahead of us, the high walls loom as we pass through in our journey to the temple and the courts. On this day in Jerusalem, there will be a death.

God has decreed that there will be a sacrifice- a sacrifice unlike any other throughout the year. Today the high priest intercedes for us with God, and the sacrifices he offers make atonement for our sins. He begins with the young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. The young bull is sacrificed for the sins of the high priest and his household. Then the priest will take two goats and present them before the Lord. He casts lots for the goats, with one goat chosen for the Lord and one goat chosen as the scapegoat. The lot is cast; the Lord's goat sacrificed as a sin offering for the sins of the people.

The blood from the sacrificed bull and goat is taken and sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, and also applied to the horns of the altar to make atonement even for the most holy place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of God's people. The other goat is taken out to the people. The high priest places his hands on the goat and confesses the sins of all the people, transferring them to the scapegoat, which then is released into the wilderness and left to die. Finally, the burnt offering is made among the people. The ram is sacrificed as atonement for the priest and all the people. Then the ram is burned with the fat from the slain bull and the goat. The bodies of the bull and the goat are taken outside the city gates and burned.

And so it is complete. The sacrifices have been made. The blood has been shed and has covered the sins of the people for another year. The scapegoat wanders alone with no food at the mercy of those who would kill it, waiting. But back in Jerusalem, the people are joyous, because they once again have been affirmed in their covenant with God. Through no work of their own but the offering they have brought before God, he has once again turned away his wrath and granted forgiveness.

All are joyous, except for one. As we stand in the temple court, the sunset heralds a new day, we anticipate a festival meal. Our companion is quiet. Imagine Jesus coming to the temple year after year, witnessing the people of God carrying out this command- witnessing this precursor to his own sacrifice-knowing he will soon be the sacrifice and the scapegoat.

God promised, through his prophet Jeremiah that he would make a new covenant with his people- not like this ceremony that must be completed each year. The new covenant would forever change the people's hearts. God would forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more- a once-and-for-all sacrifice whose blood would indeed pay the penalty for the sins of

all people. For those who allow this blood to flow over them, it covers their hearts, recreating them in an image of righteousness that reflects the Lord's goodness. As Jesus considers these things at Yom Kippur, he must have grieved for those in the crowd who would reject God's final sacrifice-those who had seen the pictures of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, and witnessed the picture that God painted in the blood of animals before them, and yet refused to see his deliverance. It is a great price Jesus will pay to redeem so few.

Yom Kippur is but a shadow of what God intended. The ram's horn sounds, and God is said to close the book of life and the book of death, having inscribed names in each. The Days of Awe are over. The people have done what they can to pacify God. If he accepts the offering of good works, a name will be inscribed in the book of life for another year. If he rejects the good deeds as insufficient, a name will be inscribed in his book of death. And while the end of this day brings rejoicing and a meal, it is an empty joy and a meal much like any other. Those who come together at Yom Kippur must ask themselves a question: how do I know in which book my name is inscribed?

The people have brought the sacrifice to God, but they are sacrifices of works and good deeds. There has been no blood, no death. But then, the temple is no more, remember? Yes, in 70 AD the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem just as Jesus had predicted. Its destruction was so complete that not one stone was left standing on another, and it has not been rebuilt to this day. So how can God expect such a sacrifice? Surely, people can reason with God. So say the rabbis following the destruction of the temple.

And so, modern Judaism was born. It was reasoned that by prayer, repentance, fasting, and good works, forgiveness could be negotiated. Today, in synagogues and homes throughout the world, the High Holy Days are observed with traditional prayers: an acrostic prayer outlines sins and asks for forgiveness. In another prayer dating back to the 9th century, The people foreswear all oaths, obligations and commitments made during the year that have hindered their relationship with God. The Jewish people fast on this day, denying themselves in an effort to please God. Good deeds are done; surely God must be pleased. The shofar sounds; the books are closed. It is done for another year.

The sundown approaches, we return to Jerusalem anticipating the meal we will share with our quiet companion. He seems downcast. His eyes are pleading. "What does your father ask of you? Do you not know?" For it is only his blood that can cover the sins of men. "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" (Leviticus 17: 11). And the question remains unanswered. "How do you know in which book your name is inscribed?" While most simply wonder, the adventurous may say, "If I live to hear the shofar blown at Rosh Hashanah next year, then my name was inscribed into the book of life." If I live another year, my work was sufficient. Only to start the cycle again.

God does not desire us to live on the treadmill of works, seeking to shed our sins in the comfort of a controlled environment of our own making. He has shown us the path. It is dusty, uncontrolled by us, sprinkled with blood. For the blood sacrifice has been made. Once, for all.

Jesus became that scapegoat. He was led into the wilderness, tempted, attacked, and he survived unharmed. He was brought to the temple, consecrated by his father, and then sacrificed, nailed to a cross of wood at the hill of the Skull. We can see and smell the blood. Now we are witnessing death. This is the one whose death can cover all our sins- an unblemished lamb, an unblemished man. Once this sacrifice was made, God had no use for a temple, so he allowed it to be destroyed. A new temple was built within the hearts of those covered by the blood of the lamb..

And so, Yom Kippur has become not a solemn day of wondering how to please a God that we barely know, but a joyful day, praising him for the atonement that he has already worked for us. From His own cross, Jesus announced, "Tetelestai," which translates as both "it is finished" and "paid in full." Therefore there is no negotiation needed. A new covenant has been given. He has forgiven our sins and remembers our wickedness no more. The treadmill is stopped, and we are on our way home. Now we can answer the question. We know in which book our name is inscribed, because we have God's promise. Our names are in the lamb's book of life, endorsed with His precious blood.