

## Title: “Our Scapegoat”

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Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:26-32

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**Service Readings:** Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:26-32

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you attended the evening Wednesday service last week you heard about the Jewish Festival of Trumpets. It was a day where God’s people would remember him as their Lord and creator and would blow ram’s horns and offer sacrifices. This festival would be the beginning of the “Days of Awe” where the Israelites would spend ten days preparing for what was to come next, the Feast of Yom Kippur (or Day of the Atonement). This marked the height of the Jewish festivals and traditions for it was the day when God would forgive his people of all their sins from the previous year.

Instead of describing this feast it would be interesting to participate in it from the perspective of someone who might have attended it with Jesus. He celebrated all of these festivals but he also knew that God had initiated them as a placeholder until he would send the Messiah to fulfill the covenantal promise he had made to Abraham. This reality must have weighed heavy on his heart as he participated year after year.

So, let us go back in time and walk with Jesus down the long dusty road, through the gates of Jerusalem. It is the Day of Atonement, and today there will be a death. God has decreed that there will be a sacrifice – a sacrifice unlike any other throughout the year. On this day, the High Priest will intercede for us, God’s people. He will offer sacrifices that will make atonement for our sins.

He will begin with the sacrifice of a young bull – a sacrifice to atone for the sins of himself and his family. He must be clean, his sins must be forgiven if he is to be the people’s mediator to God. Only then can this High Priest be considered holy, clean, and offer atonement for these people. He will then offer a sacrifice of a ram and, once complete, begin the ritual of atonement for the sins of the people. To do this, he will first take two goats and present them before the Lord. Then he will cast lots. One will be chosen for the Lord and the other will become the scapegoat. The Lord’s goat will then be sacrificed as a sin offering for the sins of the people.

The blood from the sacrificed bull as well as the now-sacrificed goat is taken into the inner-most room of the temple, the Holy of Holies. This is the place where God dwells among his people and it is only during this time each year that the high priest is allowed to enter. Once in the room, he sprinkles the blood from the sacrifice onto the ark of the covenant and the altar. This room will now be considered clean and free from the sins of the people.

The second goat, the scapegoat, is taken out and presented to the people. The high priest places his hands on its head and confesses the sins of all the people, transferring them all to the scapegoat. It is then released to wander in the wilderness and left to die. Another sacrifice is then offered and the bodies are removed from the city and burned.

The scapegoat will wander outside of Jerusalem, weighed down with the sins of the people, and will eventually die, but the Israelites, reaffirmed in their covenant with God, will celebrate for blood has been shed and has covered their sins for another year. 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 celebrate, except perhaps, one. As we stand in the temple court, the sunset heralding a new day, we turn and see Jesus. Imagine him coming to the temple year after year, witnessing the people of God carrying out this ritual, instituted and commanded by God, his Father. Imagine him witnessing this precursor to his own sacrifice – knowing that he will one day be the high priest, the sacrifice, and the scapegoat. God promised, through his prophet Jeremiah, that he would make a new covenant with his people – not like the ceremony that just ended and would have to be repeated every year. No! The new covenant would forever change people's hearts. God would forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. It would be a once-and-for-all sacrifice whose blood would indeed pay the penalty for the sins of all people, for all time. And for those who allow this blood to flow over them, it covers their hearts, recreating them in an image of righteousness where they can stand before God. As Jesus considered these things, he must have grieved for those in the crowd who would reject God's perfect and final sacrifice – those who had seen the pictures of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, witnessed the picture that God painted in the blood of animals before them, and yet refused to see his deliverance. It would be a great price Jesus would pay to redeem so few.

Jesus, our high priest. Jesus, who became the scapegoat. He was led into the wilderness, tempted, attacked by Satan, and he survived unharmed. He was brought to the temple, consecrated by his Father, and then sacrificed. But God did not leave his son in the bowels of the tomb, but brought him forth to walk the path before us, leaving his footprints for us to follow. It is not a path of our making. And sometimes it is a path that is uncomfortable. But it is a path that takes us home. During this time of Lent we recall our sins, but not so that they can be atoned – that has already been done. We recall them so that we can be reminded of the price that was paid for them. But we don't stop there, for we are also reminded that God raised him from the dead, as a victory cry over death! And we rest in the confidence that through Jesus we, too will be raised on the last day and life eternally with God. And on that day, we will fully celebrate the sacrifice that he made and the victory that he won.... All for us.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You have sent your only son to the true sacrifice that will atone for our sins. Continue to prompt us this season of Lent to be reminded of his work and to anticipate Easter when we will celebrate the victory won.

Amen.

