

February 13, 2022

“The Purification Offering”
Leviticus 4:1-5:13

FCF: Confusion about cleansing

PROPOSITION: (magnet) We need to grasp the greatness of God’s provision.
(anchor) And we see that with the purification offering.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Towards the end of the service, we’re going to sing a rich and beautiful song, “Nothing But the Blood.” This message is basically a 30-minute introduction to that song ([READ](#)):

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What does that mean? Why is it needed? Do *we* need it? If so, *how* can we be cleansed? Those are all questions worth asking. And such questions do need answers. Our text addresses this.

Now, before we read the text, let me give you a heads up as to the flow. It’s long so I want to give you a map to keep in mind as we go. Chapter 4 is in two parts. Verses 1-21 have to do with two purification offerings made inside the tabernacle itself. Verses 22-35 are two within the outer courtyard. The first six verses of chapter 5 are examples of when such offerings need to be made. And then vv. 7-13 address some alternate ways that such sacrifices could be made.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Leviticus 4:1-5:13](#) (changed to 4:1-12 and 5:1-13)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

One of my favorite movies is *Amazing Grace*, the story of William Wilberforce and his labors towards abolishing the slave trade in Great Britain. There is a scene that never fails to move me. Wilberforce visits an aging blind John Newton. Newton is dictating an account of his years as a slave trader - his confession. There had been so many and he was unable to remember their names. But he knew all too well the beastly way they were treated. Then he says ([READ quote](#)), “I remember two things very clearly. I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”

Which brings us to our text. Keep in mind the Leviticus question. “How can a holy God live among unholy people?” For sin brings not only endangerment but defilement. This offering addressed both. Which is why many scholars refer to this as the “purification offering” since that is what it brought, addressing ritual impurity and “unintentional” sins. That is, not rebelliousness but waywardness, not defiance but straying. This offering addressed that. What do we learn? Remember the Newton quote. How great is our sin. But how great is our Savior! We need to grasp the greatness of God’s provision. And we see that pictured with the purification offering.

I. THE GREATNESS OF OUR SIN

First, we see the greatness of God’s provision as we consider the greatness of our sin.

A) The Dishonor of Sin

1. The common definition

The word translated “sin” means a missing of a mark. How do we think of sin? The *Children’s Catechism* says (READ), “Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.”

2. A fuller understanding

The Hebrew understanding is that and a little more. It is a violation of “shalom” - not the way things ought to be. Sin also brings dishonor, not only upon the sinner but everyone around them.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. When children do wrong, they bring dishonor to themselves and to the family. The Israelites knew this with the defilement of sin. It came on the sinner, the family, the community, and the Lord’s holy dwelling place. It was like an unholy dust come down.

B) The Gradations of Offense

So we have the dishonor of sin. And in the stipulations here, the gradations of offense.

1. The seriousness with leaders

The sins of the high priest were more serious. Their sins had the greatest potential to lead others astray and to bring dishonor to God’s name. And actually brought guilt on the entire community.

2. The sequences to the steps

So we see in the case of their sin or the sin of the community (which included them), a particular sequence to the steps of purification. It meant going closer into the Lord’s throne room within the tabernacle, bringing a costlier offering, and a particular handling of the sacrificial blood.

C) The Defiling of the Tent

For there were gradations of offense. And, at the heart of it, a defiling of the tent itself.

1. A cleansing for the sinner

Sin brings endangerment and defilement to the sinner. So there must be cleansing for the sinner.

2. A cleansing for the Lord’s dwelling

But sin also brought defilement upon the Lord’s dwelling. And so there was a cleansing that had to take place there as well. It could not be just overlooked. God is holy. It had to be addressed.

Illustration:

It may seem to be a small thing. But it could not be allowed within the camp. I read of two recalls recently - one tied to a bacteria in shrimp and another to a flaw in a microchip. Both such small things. Just a little organism or a fraction of an error. But they have to be addressed.

It’s the same when we consider the greatness of our sin and the purity of God’s tent.

Application:

Which raises an interesting question. Where is the His tent, His tabernacle, His temple dwelling, today? Paul tells us that we are each the Lord’s temple (READ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If you go back and read the fuller context, you will see that this is written as Paul is urging his readers to flee sexual immorality. Why? He says that we are one with Christ. And the Holy Spirit lives inside us. Which is worth considering with any sin but most especially sexual sin.

But Paul says something else about our being God's temple - not just as individuals but as a corporate body (**READ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17**). We are the temple of God - not just each of us separately but all of us together. The last text was in the context of the sin of immorality. This is speaking to the sin of disunity, factions fueled by pride. Quick tempers and snap judgments. So the Lord's holy temple could be defiled in the days of the tabernacle and still today in our own.

We are in great need of God's provision. The purification offering helps us to grasp this.

II. THE GREATNESS OF OUR SAVIOR

Which then brings us to the second of our two points - the greatness of our Savior.

A) To Get Our Attention

We get a hint of that just in His desire to get His people's attention through these rites.

1. Unclean is not necessarily sinful

Obviously, much of this can be a bit confusing. We are far removed temporally and culturally from this setting. So one thing we have to say is that to be unclean was not necessarily sinful. That's a key point we'll explore in the coming weeks. To be unclean was not necessarily sinful.

2. But impurity is a metaphor for sin

That said, ritual impurity was meant to be a symbol for sin. Put another way, the need for ritual outer purity was meant to point to the need for moral inner purity. Which is often hard to detect.

Illustration:

I assume you have carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Why would you have that? Well, CO is a colorless odorless gas that, in a high enough dose, can render you unconscious and eventually kill you. So we need these detectors to draw our attention to such very real dangers.

There's something to that with what we see in Leviticus. And that is the Lord's mercy.

B) To Care for the Impoverished

But we see the greatness of our Savior not only in His desire to get our attention but also in His care for the impoverished, the poor and the powerless. We see that in Leviticus as well.

1. The heart of God

The Lord shows His heart in His commands to defend the vulnerable (**READ Exodus 23:6-7**).

2. His gracious provision

The Lord shows His heart for the impoverished in the gracious provision He makes in this offering for graduated sacrifices depending on what a household could afford. We must note this.

C) To Send Us the Ultimate Offering

But the greatest way we see the greatness of our Savior is in His sending us the ultimate purification offering to cleanse us of our sin. This offering helps us understand why Jesus came.

1. A few sample texts

The New Testament is very clear on this. Look at Hebrews (**READ Hebrews 1:3b; 13:11-12**).

2. Some great implications

Let's consider some of the implications here. Jesus' atoning death is an offering so powerful, so complete, so final that it cleanses us from all our sins - forever (**READ Hebrews 10:10-14**).

Such is the greatness of our Savior. The purifying work is utterly, finally, and fully done.

Illustration:

Think of the futility of housework. The cleaning, even a deep cleaning - getting down into places you can't normally reach or even see. It may be worth doing but it never ceases. You do it once only to have to do it yet again. And again. Not so with the cleansing Jesus brings.

Application:

But if you ponder this a bit, it will raise a question. "The purification and forgiveness I can have in Jesus is once for all and final. But aren't we supposed to ask for God's forgiveness still after we sin?" Good question. The answer is yes and that's because this is a relationship.

Jesus speaks to this in John 13 in the context of washing the feet of His disciples (**READ John 13:9-11**). Jesus is showing us that this being clean and needing washing is not an either-or but a both-and. So here's the question. Are you clean? And what are signs that you are? You would be (not perfectly but increasingly) quick and glad to confess your sin and to repent - both to the Lord and to those you've hurt. There would be a growing dependency upon Him as you spend time with Him in prayer and with others as you seek community. Those would be signs.

Friends, we have a great Savior. The purification offering helps us to see this.

CONCLUSION:

Some of you may be familiar with the James Webb Space Telescope. It has great infrared resolution and sensitivity, able to view objects 100 times fainter than the Hubble Telescope. It is expected to allow a broad range of studies and open up a host of discoveries. It was launched late December and snapped its first image just this past week. According to one article I read, there are five reasons the Webb Space Telescope is such a big deal. (**READ**) "First, it is powerful. Second, it's a time machine. Third, it will help us map the universe. Fourth, it may help us find the next Earth. And, fifth, it is a technological coup." So there's a lot of buzz. Why should you care? Well, this is the fruit of a good deal of work by some very smart folks. And, even more, the greatness of God's creation will be seen all the more through this telescope. By peering through this instrument, we will be able to see all the more the greatness of His creation.

But what of God's provision? What of His care, concern, and commitment to us? What of His solution, the salvation we so desperately need and He so graciously supplies? What can we peer through to see that? These offerings are part of the answer, part of the answer that comes to a climax with the life, work, and rule of Jesus. We have pictures of Him centuries before He actually came. Right here. The greatness of our sin and the greatness of our Savior. We need to grasp the greatness of God's provision. We see that with the purification offering.

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