

GRACE FOR THE CURE

LEVITICUS 1:1-9 JANUARY 2, 2022

It's always sad to see the Christmas season go. We love to celebrate the Gift God gave us. He sent His Son, born that man no more may die. God did not come because He was curious to see what we were up to or because He was bored of heaven. He came on a life-saving mission, to bring a cure we all need.

Today, we talk about racing to find the cure. Usually there are actual runs you can be a part of to raise money for research teams. There's the race to find a cure for cancer, the race to cure arthritis. The Michael J. Fox foundation has teams that race to cure Parkinson's. In 2015 journalists reported on the race to cure Ebola.¹ Now, of course, it's the Coronavirus. All worthy endeavors. But, for all the thousands of years of human history, we've made no progress on the plague called sin. It's the reason for all the death in this universe, all the suffering, all the hatred and violence and sorrow.

Humanity has tried many ways to deal with this affliction. We've tried to legislate it away. We've tried ignoring it or just accepting it. But, the world is just as sick as ever. That's because for *this* problem, there's only one cure and it has to come from someone who isn't infected.

There's a rare condition called Diamond-Blackfan anemia. It's a blood disease that a person is born with. While some of the short term effects can be treated for a time with blood transfusions, there is only one cure: A full bone marrow transplant from an uncontaminated donor.

Christ came to die so that we could have our sins dealt with and forgiven. That was always the plan, from eternity past. In the centuries leading up to Christ's arrival, God interacted with His people in ways that demonstrated and foreshadowed what the Messiah would do. It wasn't only an object lesson, it was also a way that sin could be temporarily dealt with, not unlike how people buy things on credit with the payment being made later. Or how those suffering from Diamond-Blackfan anemia receive blood transfusions to forestall the inevitable outcome of their disease. God established the sacrificial system that we read about in the Old Testament. It's sometimes called the Levitical Law or the Law of Moses. In this system, man was able to stay in relationship with God, personally and nationally, through a code of holiness and animal sacrifice. It wasn't the sacrifice that saved a person - it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. God has always saved by grace, through faith. But as believers participated in this arrangement, they were able to temporarily cover their sin, looking forward to the final work God would do when He sent His Son to, once for all, pay the penalty for sin and cleanse us of our unrighteousness.

The Book of Exodus ends with the Israelites completing the construction of a tent where God would dwell among them called the Tabernacle. Now, God was ready to give them the prescription that they might treat their sinful condition and stay in relationship with Him. And He begins it all with the burnt offering. This was when a person would offer an animal on the altar of God as a

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/ebola-race-find-cure>

propitiation for their sin. Meaning, it was given to turn away God's wrath against your sin, so that it would fall on that offering and you, the giver, would be reconciled to God.

This burnt offering, like the rest of the sacrifices in the Tabernacle, spoke of Christ and the work He would finish on your behalf. So, as we study these verses, we should always see them in the context of God's love for us and His giving of Jesus Christ so that we could be made right with Him.

Leviticus 1:1 - Then the Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting:

This may sound official and demanding, but in reality it reveals how concerned God is for the people of earth. He came down to their level. He was willing to allow His glory to take up residence in their little tent. I'm not much of a tent camper. I think mattresses and indoor plumbing are much more enjoyable. Some of you have spent time in the third world or disaster areas. I doubt that, while you were there, you thought, "Let's vacation here next year!" Or, "Let's move here!" But God is so full of love and compassion for us that *He* came to *us*. He called to us. He was the One that suggested this Tabernacle, where the people could interact with Him and be blessed by Him. But, that great compassion doesn't mean that God makes Himself less holy. Not in the slightest. Instead, He makes a way for us to be made right in His presence. That's what Leviticus is all about. It's what the work of Jesus is all about: Reconciling ruined man to a perfect God.

J.A. Seiss reminds us that, in the Tabernacle, God spoke from the mercy seat.² Though the Tabernacle is long gone, the Lord *still* speaks from His throne of mercy. And He speaks to *you*. He calls out to you. First by the testimony of creation. Then through the specific revelation of the Bible, which God has inspired, protected, and delivered so that you might know Him and how great His love is for you. The Holy Spirit is calling, too, drawing you to God and guiding you to the truth.

God is calling to each one of us today. Sometimes, a problem arises and people advise you to "call your congressman" or, "file a complaint with corporate." There's usually very little reaction when we do. But consider what we're seeing: The God who made heaven and earth, He sees the problem and He came to us with the solve. His fix for our failure.

Leviticus 1:2 - ²"Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When any of you brings an offering to the Lord from the livestock, you may bring your offering from the herd or the flock.

In Exodus 20, after the Israelites had heard the Ten Commandments and seen God's power, they said to Moses, "You speak to us and we'll listen, but *don't let God speak to us!*" Moses' response to them was that they didn't need to be afraid, but they withdrew. Even still, God's care for them did not flag. He was a Gentleman. He calls to Moses and says, "Please give this message to My people." And He begins to talk to them about a set of offerings.

For this sacrifice the people would bring an animal from their flocks of sheep or herds of cattle. And, even here, we see the grace of God. Yes, it would be *costly* for them to hand over a bull or a

²J.A. Seiss *The Gospel In Leviticus*

sheep, but these were animals that were readily available to all of Israel. He didn't say, "You're going to have to bring me a snow leopard or a humpback whale." That seems silly, but He *could* have demanded that. Instead, He selects something that was right at their fingertips.

You see, God *wants* to reconcile people to Himself. He *wants* to have a relationship with each of us. He *wants* to bear away our sins. He is a Physician who desires to cure our terminal, spiritual disease.

But, the offering had to be voluntary and made with something of your own. You couldn't trap a gopher on the way. It was *your* animal.

As we've been learning in the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. God didn't find some poor sap by the wayside and offer them on the cross. He gave His only begotten Son.

Notice who His offer is made to: "any of you." It didn't matter if they were male or female, rich or poor, important or unknown. Everyone was invited. The same is true today. Jesus once cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."³ And in Revelation 22, the Holy Spirit says, "Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life freely."

If you would be forgiven of your sin and made whole, you only need to come to Jesus in obedience and faith. As J. Vernon McGee says, "none are excluded except those who exclude themselves."⁴ God doesn't keep people out of heaven. He's trying to keep you out of hell!

Leviticus 1:3 - ³"If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to bring an unblemished male. He will bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting so that he may be accepted by the Lord.

Only a *perfect* sacrifice was acceptable. You can't clean a muddy spot with a muddy rag. This stipulation was highlighting the fact that the Messiah would have to be absolutely perfect in every way - and Jesus is. He was without sin, without deceit. When He was insulted, He did not insult in return. He never erred, never failed, never came up short. Because of His perfection, He is the acceptable, *final* substitute for all mankind. You see, the Israelites had to make these offerings again and again. It was a transfusion, not a transplant. But, Jesus paid it all, *once for all*.

The Israelites were to bring a particular offering to a particular place. No DIY option when it comes to salvation. We must come on God's terms, otherwise our effort is unacceptable. We're familiar with "acceptable forms of identification." This is "acceptable form of propitiation," and there's only one. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." And God the Father agreed. He said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

³ John 7:37

⁴ J. Vernon McGee *Thru The Bible Vol. 6: The Law*

And the only acceptable offering was *death*. It would do no good to bring gold. You couldn't leave promises to "do better" on the altar. No double-or-nothing bets that the *rest* of your life would be lived perfectly. There had to be a life-for-life substitute. Because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. That's how serious sin is. It's easy for us to be very casual about sin. But sin is no piddling thing. We tend to think of it as a little water spill on the floor. Not that big of a deal, easily dealt with. Or just leave it and it'll dry on its own. Back in 2014, lab personnel found 6 "forgotten" vials of smallpox in a cardboard box in Washington.⁵ What if the spill is small pox? Then we're a little more concerned, right? That's what sin is. It is the deadliest thing in the world and it is the natural byproduct of the human heart. This is why the Messiah had to die. But, when you accept Jesus as your Savior and Substitute, in Him you have redemption through His blood.

Leviticus 1:4 - ⁴He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering so it can be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

You may have heard some different explanations of what this word "atonement" means. It can mean the process through which you are made at-one-with God. It is also a term that can speak of your sin being *covered*.⁶ It can also mean the "wiping away" of your impurity.⁷ And, while the priests did offer burnt offerings daily, weekly, and monthly in a general sense for the nation, what we're talking about here is a personal, voluntary choice to go to God for forgiveness. And we see here just how personal it was. The offerer would bring forward his splendid animal, healthy and strong, full of life. And there, at the altar, he would place his hand on the head, symbolically recognizing that this innocent animal was going to die for something *the offerer* was guilty of.

Of course, the sheep and bulls had no say in it, but Jesus did. He did not have to do what He did. But He went willingly to the cross, enduring the shame and the horrors of that suffering for the *joy* that was set before Him - you and me. His love for you is so great He laid down His own life for you.

Leviticus 1:5-6 - ⁵He is to slaughter the bull before the Lord; Aaron's sons the priests are to present the blood and splatter it on all sides of the altar that is at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁶Then he is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces.

'He is to slaughter,' meaning the *offerer*, not the priests. When you brought your animal in, *you* laid your hand on, then *you* cut its throat and *you* butchered it down yourself. What a sober experience this must have been. Last week, we had to put down our beloved, old cat. I'd rate the experience 0 stars. I was there, but, thankfully, I didn't have to do the job. I can't imagine having to perform this sacrificial task again and again and again, knowing each time that it was happening, not because the animal was sick or hurt or old, but that *my sin* was the cause of all this suffering and death.

It was *your sin* which nailed Jesus to the cross, yours and mine. Like these burnt offerings, He was an innocent victim. But our trespasses were put on Him so we might become righteous.

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-28221185>

⁶ See *Bible Knowledge Commentary* & S.H. Kellogg *Studies In Leviticus*

⁷ *NET Study Bible Notes*

Leviticus 1:7 - ⁷The sons of Aaron the priest will prepare a fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

Once the Levitical system was established this fire on the altar was never put out. It was to be kept continually burning.⁸ Jesus is now our High Priest. He is *always* ready to receive you. He is *always* ready to be your atonement - to make you right with God and cleanse you of your sin. All you have to do is come to Him. You don't have to bring a bull or a lamb. Just your heart and your faith.

Romans 10:9-10 - If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

Leviticus 1:8-9 - ⁸Aaron's sons the priests are to arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat on top of the burning wood on the altar. ⁹The offerer is to wash its entrails and legs with water. Then the priest will burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a food offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

How could something so bloody and terrible be a "pleasing aroma to the Lord?" It's not the death that He was happy about, it was the dealing with sin and the restoration of relationship between God and man. God the Father loves His Son. He wasn't happy to see Him suffer. Yet He was pleased to crush Him as a guilt offering so that we might have a chance to be saved.

We see in this offering a specificity. A certain place, certain types of animals, a certain way of breaking the offering down and washing it and arranging it. It speaks to us of the fact that this spiritual work is not haphazard. You couldn't just throw a pile of guts around and call that "atonement." God was the only One who could solve the sin problem, and His way is the only way. Not our own spin on it, not what makes sense for today, but His way, revealed in Scripture. For the Jews, it was this system which looked forward to the final sacrifice made by the Messiah Himself. For us, the sacrificial work is finished. Now we look *back* in faith to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Perfect, Spotless Lamb of God. If you want to be cured of your sin and live a life in right standing before God, freed from guilt and ruin, this is the only way.

In 2002 Katie Trebing was born with Diamond-Blackfan anemia. Within hours she needed a transfusion or she would die. She would need them again and again to put off death for a little while longer. But, in the end, the treatment wouldn't be able to save her. There was only one hope: a bone marrow transplant. But Katie's older brother wasn't a match. So, Katie's father and mother decided to have *another* child. And in 2005 Christopher Trebing was born. Katie's mom said, "He was always smiling, never cranky ... the perfect baby." A year later, the transplant happened. And in 2007 Katie was taken off all medications and declared cured by her doctors.⁹ She needed to become new inside and she did because someone else gave herself to her.

⁸ Leviticus 6:13

⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=4038908&page=1>

Jesus Christ was born to die. That was the only way that people could be saved from sin and restored to God. But, just like we see in this Old Testament system, it was not something forced upon people. It was a free invitation. All the work has been done. The way has been paved by the blood of Jesus. Will you go to Him and receive all He wants to give?

For those of us who are saved, we need not worry that His atoning work will wear off or that He will forget our names are written in His Book of Life. And, thankfully, we no longer need to bring bulls or rams to slaughter in His house. Instead we can bask in His finished work of atonement and enjoy His ongoing work of sanctification in our lives as we stay near to Him, following as He leads, this God who loves us so much.