

Seeking God's Grace Leviticus 4 – 6:7

This past Monday was President's day. Adriana, I and our Canadian friends made a get away to Las Vegas. I had not been to Las Vegas for 13 years and I noticed much has changed. And not for the good I might add. I had a deep nagging feeling being in the Paris LV Casino that I was in the ancient Greek temple of Aphrodite in Corinth. I noticed that since our last visit alcohol was now openly carried and consumed on the streets and given freely to those making the sacrifices in the slot lounges. On every street corner Spanish workers were handing out business cards with pictures of nude women who you could engage in a no strings attached encounter. The slots were now much easier to work, the foliage was more luxurious, the exhibits more grand, the entertainment more sensual, the shops more high end, and the advertisements more skin. The strip was an amazing stretch of high places from around the world designed to capture our hearts and our minds and our worship and especially our money.

The altars to the god mammon were near the entrance of the temples. They were massive, and continued burning day and night, and there was no end in the amount of worshippers who were offering their sacrifices in the hope of gaining the jack pot of grace and prosperity. The beds and the meals in each casino were discounted to make access to the Holy of Holies easy and barrier free. And they tell us that Las Vegas is now child friendly. There are programs for the children so that parents can spend worry free time feeding the slots or playing black jack.

And there we were, Adriana and I, your pastors walking about in sin city. dangerous

In Leviticus chapter 4 - 6 God addressed his people a second time. Again God is calling to his people from the glory of the tent of meeting, from the Holy of Holies. And the question behind God's instructions is this. Do you want to live and be in a relationship with God - the holy, almighty, glorious creator of heaven and earth? Do you want to live in his will and experience his blessings and his grace and serve his kingdom purposes in your life? Do you want to experience Immanuel - God with us?

Well this is what God says to those seeking God's grace and desiring God's favor. "When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands" you must bring a sin offering and a restitution offering. These two liturgical acts, worship action are the building blocks of a relationship with God. God says: You must go through all the steps required to make atonement for sin, to undo the power and the consequences and the pollution of sin and to seek forgiveness. Later on in the Book of Leviticus probably the key verse of this worship manual God tells his people in Chapter 19:2 " Be Holy because I the LORD your God am holy.

Sin is a serious issue for those seeking God's grace. The wages of sin is death the bible teaches. (Romans 6:23) Sin results in brokenness, and depression, and divorce and hatred

and injustice and causes immeasurable suffering and pain and sadness. Not doing anything about sin is dangerous. Worship without dealing with sin is anemic and misdirected. In these three chapters 4-6 God speaks to us about the two offerings designed to deal with sin. The sin offering and the restitution/guilt offering. Seven times in the description of the sin offering God says: “In this way, through this offering, the priest will make atonement for the people and they will be forgiven.” (Leviticus 4:20, 26,31,35; 5:6, 10, 13)

And three times in the description of the guilt or restitution offering God says: “In this way, through this offering, the priest will make atonement for them before the LORD, and they will be forgiven for any of the things they did or did not do that made them guilty.” (Lev 5:16, 18 & 6:7)

You would think God repeating himself ten times on this matter would indicate that sin is not only a serious issue for us but even a more serious issue for God. God wants to make us holy, to sanctify us, so we can enter his holy presence and enter into holy communion with him.

In these chapters various levels of sin are addressed. The sin of the priest is most serious and the sin of the whole community is equally serious. We can tell the level of seriousness by the value of the animals required to make the atonement. The next level of sin is the sin of the leaders and finally God addresses the sins of the ordinary people starting with the more affluent and then also speaking to those who are very poor. The point is no matter who you are, you need to be forgiven to enter a grace relationship with God and experience his blessings. Paul says in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and need to be redeemed through the blood of the atoning sacrifice.” Especially the pastors and leaders and disciples of Jesus need to be holy.

I don't have time to go into all the details of each of these offerings. So let's look for a moment at the sin offering sacrificed for the sin of the whole community. Verse 13 - 21.

Dealing with sin God's way required a young bull without defect.

The elders of the community placed their hands on the head of the bull transferring their sin and the sin of the people to the animal.

The young bull was then slaughtered at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

The blood is taken into the tent and sprinkled in front of the Holy of Holies curtain.

The blood is dabbed seven times on the altar in the holy place in front of the curtain to purify the altar and the space so that God's holy work can be done.

The blood is then taken outside and splashed onto the burnt offering altar at the entrance of the tent of meeting to make it holy. Then the fat portions of the bull are burnt on the burnt offering altar that burns 24-7 as a symbolic memorial of God burning up of sin.

Then the rest of the sin infected animal is taken outside the camp and all the sins of the

people are completely burned away. This is how the priest makes atonement for all those who have sinned. This is how God grants forgiveness.

But not only is a sin offering made; a second offering is required called the restitution offering. The restitution offering is the penalty part for sin. You don't just say sorry and symbolically let the animal pay for your sins. A penalty and restitution has to be made. If you stole something you paid back what you stole and you paid the owner an additional penalty of 20% of the value plus you gave the priest a valuable ram. Dealing with sin in other words is not just a matter between God and you. It is also a matter between you and the person you sinned against.

The AA process has it right. You take an inventory of your sins, confess them, and then make every effort to restore the brokenness your sin caused. You apologize to the people you hurt and you make every effort to restore and undo what you broke. This makes good biblical sense.

So when anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands a sin offering and a restitution offering must be made. And in this way atonement is made and we are forgiven.

These are the words God spoke to his people from the tent of meeting. These words show us how God thinks about sin and the pattern God designed for us to deal with sin. Today however, we don't have a tent of meeting, nor do we have a temple. The New Testament tells us that we the living stone of the church are the temple of God. We are the altar; we are the tent of meeting, and that Jesus is the one who is sacrificed for our sins. His blood purifies us for service. His blood pays the penalty, and his life makes restitution for the sin and pain we cause. At the crucifixion of Jesus the elders and leaders of the nation put their hands on Jesus and placed the sins of the world on him. His blood was spilt in the Holy City but then he was crucified outside the city. When Jesus gave up his spirit it says Matthew 27 the curtain of the temple blocking the entrance into the Holy of Holies was torn in two by God himself, from top to bottom. People who had died as result of sin were raised to life. This is the restitution God makes. The wages of sin is death but the restitution gift of God's atoning sacrifice in Jesus gives life. When the sin offering was finished the restitution offering allow everyone even those who had died to come into the holy city and enter the Holy of Holies to communion with God and enjoy his grace.

Next week we will celebrate the Lord's Supper and have an opportunity to experience communion with God in a very real concrete way. This coming into the Holy of Holies is made possible through sin offerings and restitution offering we still make today. Sin is still a serious issue when it comes to our relationship and our experience of God. Sin is still a serious issue when it comes to our relationships with each other. Not dealing with sin is dangerous. For us to deal with sin today we don't spill the blood of animals, because

Jesus sacrifice was enough and ended that whole sacrificial system, but we still confess our sins to God and to each other and look to Jesus, for by his wounds we are healed, (1 Peter 2) by his blood we are atoned with God, by his crucified body we are forgiven all our sins.

1 John 1:8 says if we claim to be without sin. If we just go about our business not really taking our sin serious, not really concerned when our leaders and pastors visit sin city, and we offer our sacrifice to the false gods of this age, and do even unintentionally what is forbidden in any of God's commands John says the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, if we lay our hands on the head of Jesus, speaking and describing the ways we have sinned, then God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If any one sins today we have an advocate with God the father, Jesus Christ. He is our atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world.

And so in worship in our time we need to show that we take sin serious. We need to take time to confess our sin, to become aware of our sin, and to plead for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. Each day and each week and each time we worship we need to deal with sin God's way. And so this week as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, for that communion feast with God next Sunday, listen to what God says to us from that holy of Holies in the tent of meeting. When you come to the tent of meeting bring your sin offerings and your restitution offerings. Be ready to confess your sins. Be able to list them and be willing repent and make every effort to be holy as God is holy. We are invited into Holy Communion with the God

And so today I would like to challenge you to spend some time this week to prepare for the Lord Supper, that Holy Communion encounter with God next week. I invite you to read and meditate on Leviticus 1-7, to read 1 Peter and Psalm 50 and 51. Come to church next week with a list of sins to confess. And I challenge you to pray; not just for yourself, but pray for the forgiveness of sins of others, your family, your neighbors, your leaders, your church, and your pastors. Sin has a way of crouching at the doors of our lives and ruining us, and ruining our relationships with others and with God. So read and pray. This is seeking God's grace - our spiritual life depends on it.