

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

March 20—Leviticus 16: 1 - 14

Leviticus 16 tells us that the Day of Atonement was to be observed once a year as an everlasting ordinance for the nation of Israel. On this day Aaron was to make atonement for himself and for the nation. This was the day that all of the sin of Israel was dealt with. First, everything, including Aaron, had to be cleansed through the sprinkling of blood.

Aaron was the High Priest over Israel, and he represented the people before God, but he was also very much part of the people he represented. He had the same need for cleansing that they did. Look what he had to do before he could offer a sacrifice for the people.

First, before he could even put on the sacred garments, he had to bathe himself. This was both a physical and a ceremonial cleansing. The filth of the world had to be washed from him, it could not just be covered up by sacred garments. The same is true for us isn't it? In 1 Peter 2: 9, Peter refers to us a kingdom of priests, but what has to happen to us before we can begin to serve as priests? We have to put on the sacred garments of Christ's righteousness.

"You who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"
(Galatians 3:27).

"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation, and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness"
(Isaiah 61:10)

But what has to happen to a person before God can clothe them in the righteousness of Christ, in garments of salvation, in robes of righteousness? They have to be washed—made clean by Christ's blood.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us **(1 John 1:6-9)**

And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **(Revelation 7: 14)**

To be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, we must first, be washed clean by his blood.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

Once Aaron was clean and robed in the sacred garments, Aaron then had to offer a bull for his own sacrifice to atone for his sins. Think about that, before Aaron could make atonement for the people, he first had to make atonement for his own sins. What a difference between Aaron the High Priest, and Jesus our great High Priest.

Hebrews 7: 26- 28 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Unlike Aaron, Jesus our Great High Priest, had no need to first offer a sacrifice for his own sin, because though he was made like us in every way, he was yet without sin.

Hebrews 4: 14 – 16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What a Great High Priest we have in Jesus!

March 21—Leviticus 16: 15 - 25

After Aaron, had been bathed, clothed in sacred garments, and made atonement for his own sins, Aaron was then able to begin to make atonement for the sins of Israel. Aaron did this by selecting two goats. Both goats were to be a sacrifice. One was to be slaughtered, and the other sent away as a scapegoat.

The blood of the slaughtered goat was used to cleanse the Tabernacle, and its furnishing from the sin and uncleanness of the Israelites. Once this was done, then Aaron took the live goat and placed both hands upon it. In doing this Aaron was symbolically placing the sins of the nation on the head of a scapegoat and it was then sent out of the camp into the desert wilderness. In this way, the sin was symbolically carried away into the wilderness, where it would be remembered no more, and the

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

nation was once again made holy, freeing the people from their guilt—if the sin is gone the guilt is gone as well.

But how long did being guilt free last? How long before sin once again defiled everything? Once again the writer of Hebrews uses the requirements that God put in place in the book of Leviticus to show us the surpassing greatness of Jesus.

Hebrews 9: 11 – 14 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered **once for all** into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Do you see how the writer of Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus' sacrifice was once and for all? It doesn't have to be offered again because it is the perfect sacrifice offered by the perfect High Priest.

Hebrews 10:12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God

Why did Jesus sit down? Because just as he said on the cross, "It is finished." There is no longer a need for continuing sacrifices. Christ's sacrifice is once and for all.

How quickly and easily we forget that Jesus' death, like the first goat, was the propitiation (payment) for our sins and, as a result of his sacrifice, our sins are carried away (expiated), which is symbolized by the second goat being led out into the wilderness. "Many a person today who suffers from what is called a guilt complex could profit by a study of this ritual for the atonement and removal of sin."¹

In Christ, through his sacrifice, the debt for our sin is paid once and for all, and our sin and guilt are taken away, as far as the east is from the west, led into the wilderness where they are forgotten and remembered no more.

¹ R. Laird Harris *Expositors Bible Commentary* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) p 588.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

March 22—Leviticus 16: 26 - 28

Leviticus 16:26-28 deals specifically with the items and people who had a part in the Day of Atonement. Notice that each of these became polluted by sin and had to be either put outside of the camp or washed to be made clean, because in their service to God to make atonement for God's people, they became unclean, polluted by sin.

The remains of the bull and goat that were offered as a sacrifice to atone for sin, were to be taken outside the camp and burned. The man who took the remains outside the camp had to remain outside the camp until he had washed and bathed himself. The man who took the scapegoat to the wilderness had to remain outside of the camp until his clothes were washed and he had bathed.

The phrase "outside the camp" occurs in 14 different verses in the book of Leviticus but it is a key component of New Testament theology. In the book of Leviticus there were a variety of things that were to be taken and placed outside the camp. The spent ashes of a sacrifice, the dead bodies of Nadab and Abihu, those with infectious skin diseases, and blasphemers. The point is this, things that became unclean and polluted by sin had to be taken outside of the camp to be dealt with. When something or someone became unclean they were put out of the camp, cut off.

Now think what the writer of Hebrews says about Jesus.

Hebrews 13: 11 - 13 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

Look at the direct connection the writer of Hebrews makes with what happened in the book of Leviticus and Jesus, as he compares Jesus and the remains of the sacrificial offerings from the Day of Atonement. He points out how Jesus was crucified outside of the gates of the city and we are left to draw the conclusion that this is because he became polluted with our sin. Why would he draw that conclusion? From Jesus' last words on the cross:

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you **forsaken** me?”

What was Jesus experiencing as he uttered those words? Being taken outside the camp, being removed from the presence of the Father, because he became polluted with our sin.

Look again at Hebrews 13:13. The writer of Hebrews tells us to join in Jesus’ disgrace outside the gates. Why would he say that? Do we become unclean by associating with Jesus? Of course not! But rather it is just as Paul tells us:

Philippians 3: 7 – 11 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Being willing to join Jesus outside the camp, bearing the shame that he bore, is the means by which we are sanctified—set apart—made holy as he is holy. By joining Jesus outside the camp, we separate ourselves from the camp of this world and are made holy through his blood.

March 23—Leviticus 19: 1 - 18

In Leviticus 19 there is a commentary on the Decalogue (10 Commandments) of Exodus 20 by which Leviticus fleshes out what obedience to the commandments means, and it is all developed under the rubric of “Be holy because I am Holy” (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2). The whole premise and reason for properly understanding these laws and applying them to one’s daily life was to be holy, to be set apart, to be different from those who live outside of the community of faith. Jesus understood that and it was the central message of his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus again reminds his listeners that they are to be holy to be set apart. He reminds them that they are the light and salt of the world (Matthew 5: 13-16), that is, they are to stand out from those who live outside the community of faith. And how are they to do this? By living under the law in a deep and meaningful way. Not just with surface obedience but with obedience that comes from the heart. It is not enough to not murder or to not commit adultery, one must also not hate or look lustfully (Matthew 5: 21-30). In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus follows the pattern of Leviticus 19 showing how careful heartfelt observance of the law leads to one being holy and set apart.

Ultimately one could say that Jesus appropriated Leviticus 19:17—to love your neighbor as yourself—as the theme verse for his ministry. Jesus not only used this verse from Leviticus to answer the Teachers of the Law when they asked him what the greatest commandment was, but in many ways this verse explained both his ministry and the way he was calling his followers to live. Jesus said in John 15:13 that there was no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends; and throughout his life one can see Jesus do exactly that. He not only laid down his life on the cross, but before that, he laid it down time and time again to serve the needs of others.

What was this life of service based on? Leviticus 19:2. What is our life of service based on? Leviticus 19: 2. “Be holy, because I am holy.”

When the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was tempted in every way and yet was without sin we need to understand the framework of the law that Jesus lived under to appreciate his flawless perfection. If we ignore the message of Leviticus we lose the perspective of what this means to us. We minimize Jesus’ sinless perfection if we do not understand the rigorous requirements laid out in Leviticus for righteous living. By living this sinless life the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was able to become both our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), and the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27).

March 24 – Numbers 6: 22 – 27

Today we read the very familiar words that we often hear at the end of a worship service as a benediction. These were the words that God told Aaron to pronounce as a blessing over the Israelites. As you read these

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

words stop and think about how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this blessing.

“The Lord bless you”

Ephesians 1:3-8 *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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*

We have been blessed in every way because of Christ. Jesus is God's ultimate blessing in our lives.

“and keep you”

John 10:11-30 *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."*

Because of Christ we are kept safe for all of eternity.

“the Lord make his face to shine upon you.”

2 Corinthians 4:6 *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Through Christ we see God's face shine (smile) upon us, as the light of Christ shines into our lives.

“and be gracious to you.”

John 1:16-17 *From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's grace to us.

“the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Romans 5:1-2 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have*

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Through Jesus and his death on the cross we have peace with God.

March 25—Numbers 11: 33 – 36

Think about the words that Moses spoke as Israel moved on each day on their journey to the Promised Land, “Arise, let your enemies be scattered.” Who are God’s enemies? As you read the Bible, it becomes clear that there are only two choices for each of us—there is no neutral ground. We are either on the Lord’s side, the side of righteousness, or on Satan’s side the side of evil. We can’t straddle between the two sides. It is one or the other.

Whether we realize it, or not, we are in the midst of spiritual warfare. Paul makes this very clear in:

Ephesians 6: 10 – 12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

This is a battle that is raging on, even though often times we don’t realize it, because it is a spiritual battle taking place in the heavenly realms. At the cross, Christ, our warrior king defeated Satan, sin, and death.

Colossians 2: 13 – 15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Even though are enemies are defeated they haven’t given up. But day by day the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is advancing, slowly but surely rolling back the darkness.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

But the scattering of God's enemies is only half of what Moses' prayed each day. Look at what he prayed each night as Israel once again settled into their camp: "Return O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel." Moses' was praying that at the end of each day God would gather His people and make his presence known to them.

Jesus our warrior king not only triumphs over our enemies he gathers his elect to be with him forever.

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

The Book of Revelations shows the very marked contrast between the elect, the people of God gathered by Christ, and the enemies of God scattered by Christ. While the elect are gathered around the throne of the Lamb celebrating what Christ has done for them, gathering them and making them his own:

Revelation 7: 9 – 10 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The enemies of Christ are scattered and flee to the hills hoping that the rocks will cover them and protect them from his coming wrath.

Revelation 6: 15- 17 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

In the end, there are only two places to stand. Either around the Throne of the Lamb in joyous celebration, or hiding from the Lamb in dread and fear.

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

March 26 – Numbers 17

The Israelites had grown more and more unhappy with Aaron and Moses as their leaders. They began to question why only Aaron and his family could serve as priests, so God told Moses to have each tribe of Israel bring a staff (a piece of dead wood), place the tribe's name on it, and set it in the Tent of Meeting (The Tabernacle). God told Moses that the staff that belonged to the man of God's choosing would miraculously sprout and come to life. Aaron's staff not only came to life overnight, it also blossomed and produced almonds proving that Aaron was the man of God's choosing.

What does this have to do with Jesus? Through Jesus, that which is dead comes to life, and produces fruit. Look what Paul writes in:

Ephesians 2:1-5 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

In a spiritual sense, we were just as dead as Aaron's staff was, but through Christ we have been made alive again, but not just alive, but alive and fruitful.

John 15:5-6 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

Without Jesus we are just a dead stick waiting to be burned in the fire, but with Jesus we are made alive and fruitful, just like Aaron's staff.

But remember this, it is all a work of God. Aaron didn't make his staff bud, blossom and produce fruit, God did, and the same is true for us. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Ephesians 2: 10), and God will finish what He has started in our lives because He is faithful.

Philippians 1: 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.