

Subject: *The Blood Atonement*

Scripture: *Leviticus 17:11*

The Book of Leviticus is all about worship and how sinful people can be right with a holy God. It speaks of sacrifices for sin and the proper way to approach God. One thing stands out in this book and especially in this chapter: these are God-given instructions. Sinful man was not left to devise a plan by which he could approach God. God did that and He made the instructions clear. I want to draw your attention to three things:

THE PLACE CHOSEN BY GOD

The place for atonement was the altar. The altar was a place of sacrifice that involved the shedding of blood. God told them how to worship and where to worship. The altar was the only place for sinners to approach and worship God.

The early part of Leviticus 17 warns the people of Israel not to offer sacrifices in the place of their own choosing. God chose a special place. No other place was acceptable to God. We must come to God in His way.

At this point in time God's special place was the tabernacle, a moveable tent that was set up and taken down as it traveled with Israel on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people must offer the sacrifice for atonement on the altar inside the tabernacle.

Long before this altar in the tabernacle, God established the altar as a place where sinners could approach and worship Him. The first mention of an altar was when Noah built an altar after the flood. Abraham had an altar and so did Abraham's son, Isaac, and Isaac's son, Jacob. Moses built an altar after Israel's victory over Amalek. Then God prescribed two special altars inside the tabernacle and years later inside the temple: the bronze altar of sacrifice and the golden altar of incense. The one mentioned here in Leviticus is the bronze altar where blood sacrifices were offered to God. This altar was the focal point of worship.

None of these altars was meant to take away all sin. These altars were good for a time, but they pointed toward another altar, the supreme altar, the cross of Calvary, where the perfect and final sacrifice for sins was made.

*Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace or was away the stain
But Christ, the Heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away
A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.*

THE PENALTY PAID BY GOD

This was the penalty of sin. The penalty was paid by the blood on the altar. God said, "I have given it to you upon the altar." The purpose of the altar was to offer a blood sacrifice that would make atonement for sin. Atonement (Heb. *kaphar*) means "covering," but it came to include the idea of pardon, forgiveness, and reconciliation of guilty sinners by divine sacrifice. The only way to cover the guilt and shame of sin was blood atonement or covering. God could then look upon man with favor to forgive and accept him. The only way for God to satisfy His own justice was to pay the penalty for sin. He did this by taking the life of innocent animals in the place of guilty sinners. We call this "substitutionary atonement."

We may think of an altar at church as a place of beauty, but the altar of sacrifice was a gory sight, a place where innocent animals were slaughtered. Every blood sacrifice reminded the people of the horrible cost of sin. We observe Communion and it is very proper and clean, and we often forget what it represents.

The life of the flesh is in the blood. This is *a scientific truth* and *a saving truth*. Blood carries oxygen and nutrition to all parts of the body, so it represents the essence of life itself. People often died from the practice of blood-letting. It is thought that George Washington died this way. William Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood in the early 1600s.

There is power in the blood to sustain physical life, but there is power in the blood to provide eternal life. The sacrifice of blood means that one life was given for another.

Verse 11 is one of the key verses in the Bible. Innocent blood had to be shed and put on the altar. From the very beginning God required blood sacrifice to make atonement and pay the penalty for sin. Adam and Eve's clothing made from animal skins. Abel's offering was accepted by God and Cain's was rejected because Abel offered a blood sacrifice, but Cain offered the produce of the field.

John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Jesus and said, ***John 1:29*** *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* In the Book of Revelation, the people in heaven saying, ***Revelation 5:12*** *Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.*

THE PARDON APPLIED BY GOD

The place of atonement was the altar. The penalty paid on the altar was innocent blood of a substitute. God took the value of the blood shed on the altar and counted it worthy to make atonement for the soul. Full pardon for sins is the result of blood atonement. The people approached God in this prescribed way by faith. They put their complete trust that the blood on the altar was what God required.

In the same way God applies the value of Christ's blood on the cross to all who put their trust in His sacrifice. Isaiah gives us a perfect illustration of how this works.

Isaiah 6:1-7 ¹ *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. ⁶ Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.* In that majestic vision of Isaiah we see three things. God is holy. We are sinful. God takes away our sin by the sacrifice on the altar. God purged Isaiah's sin with a live coal which taken from off the altar. A live coal represents the ongoing benefits of a complete sacrifice. The fire had consumed the sacrifice, but the coal was still glowing and had the power to take away sin.

Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice 2,000 years ago and the value of His sacrifice is still able to take away our sins. It is the only thing that will take away sins and make us right with God.

Six truths about blood atonement:

- 1) All people are guilty sinners
- 2) Innocent blood must be sacrificed
- 3) Guilt is transferred to the innocent
- 4) Guilt is removed from the guilty
- 5) Full pardon for sin is granted
- 6) Righteousness is freely given

We sometimes refer to the invitation as an altar call, but we need to understand that the front of the church is not the altar we must come to. We must come to the foot of the cross and realize that Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God sacrificed to make atonement for us.

It may be that you have come to the front of the church, but you've never come to the foot of the cross. By faith come to the cross and God will meet you there to take away your sin.