

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 7

Faith in the Slain Lamb

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 15th September, 1985**

Text: *"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Leviticus 1. 4).*

Leviticus is the Epistle to the Hebrews prefigured. The Epistle to the Hebrews is Leviticus fulfilled. When you come to the Book of Leviticus, seek grace to look beyond all the details and all the shadows to the Lord Jesus; look beyond the lamb to Christ; look beyond the altar to Calvary, for here we see the Lord's wonderful provision under the ceremonial law for an Israelite who was conscious of his guilt.

You see, really the ceremonial law to ancient Israel was the gospel. Mind you, the way into the holiest of all was not yet made by the blood of Jesus. It was a dark dispensation. There were the clouds, the shadows. But to ancient Israel, the ceremonial law was their gospel, and I believe many a godly Israelite looked through it all and beyond it all to Christ and Him crucified. Beloved friends, we are on holy ground tonight, as we go along with this Israelite, conscious of his sin and guilt, taking that lamb without blemish, bringing it there to the altar, seeing it slain in his place, laying his hand upon its head, confessing his sin, and the assurance given there of cleansing, forgiveness, through what that slain lamb signified. "It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." Many a feelingly-guilty Israelite went away with peace in his conscience, peace through peace-speaking blood.

Right from the beginning, there was always personal religion. You find it with Adam and Eve soon after the Fall. Personally they tried to clothe themselves in fig-leaf righteousness. Personally they learnt its deficiency. Personally they heard the awful question, "Where art thou?" and personally they were clothed in the coats of skins.

You know, animals at that time were not allowed to be killed for food. There was only one thing they could be slain for, and that was sacrifice. So there must have been a sacrifice, because apart from this, there could be no coats of skins.

And then you see Abel. How personal his religion was! “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” It was the slain lamb. From Adam, right down through the patriarchs, to Aaron, every man was priest in his own house. Then there were the rites and ceremonies that were ordained. There was that provision for that sinner with a personal need and a personal sense of guilt.

Really, beloved friends, as we journey on, this is the only thing that matters, isn’t it? We have the things that try us and perplex us and dismay us, the things that burden us and trouble us and cast us down. O but really only this one thing matters: our soul’s standing personally in the sight of a holy, heart-searching God, and for our souls to have a personal interest in Christ and Him crucified. In fifty years’ time, one hundred years’ time, all these other things that are bothering us today will not matter. But one thing will matter: did you, did I have a saving interest in Christ, the Lamb of God? It is the only thing that matters – to know Christ, to be found in Him, to be forgiven by Him, to have an interest in His precious blood.

Well, then, let us look at this beautiful type and the more beautiful reality. “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Why does this offerer come? Why does he venture with the sacrifice? Why does he come to the priest? Because he realises his personal sin, his personal unworthiness, his personal guilt, because it is a burden to him. He longs for peace of conscience. He seeks for mercy, for forgiveness. His relationship with God is wrong. He cannot stand in the presence of divine holiness, and how can he die? Now that is the reason why he comes. That is the reason why he brings the burnt sacrifice.

And those of you who fear God, when the Lord began with you and quickened you into life, then you felt your need of a sacrifice. You were concerned about your relationship with a holy God. You knew you were not right, that sin condemns, that sin must be punished, that sin must exclude from God’s presence. “The wages of sin is death.” O how many of you have been awakened to that one vital point, that by nature your relationship with a holy God is wrong, that by nature you are under His wrath, liable to His divine wrath? And then to be led to this: that you need a sacrifice, you need an atonement.

No doubt there were many Israelites who were satisfied with what they could do, but not this man here. He looks for salvation by blood. He wants forgiveness by sacrifice. Why doesn't he try to appease God by efforts of his own, and why don't you? Tell me, how many of you have been brought here:

“Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone”?

You cannot do without Christ. You cannot do without precious blood. Now that is the religion that will take you to heaven, and nothing else will.

So we have this lamb, this burnt offering, a lamb without blemish, no spot, no imperfection. Right through the Old Testament, if one lesson is taught more than another it is this: the need of a lamb, and the vital truth that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins. It all pointed forward to Christ, and we venture tonight to the river Jordan, dear John the Baptist, there preaching that solemn, separating ministry, laying the axe to the root of the trees. And one day in their midst there appears a Stranger. They had not seen Him before. And John, looking on Jesus as He walked, said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” Now this is God's answer to all these types and shadows, all the prophecies, all the promises – the dear Lamb of God. It speaks of God's holy One, His dear, incarnate Son, He who is the Son of God from all eternity, but who becomes Man, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens. “Behold the Lamb of God.”

But the vital thing was that the Lamb must be slain – not just the dear Lamb of God as an example, but the Lamb must be slain. His blood must be shed. He must be crucified on the cross. He must die, the Just for the unjust to bring us to God, bearing His people's guilt, bearing it for ever away. O it is the slain Lamb that is the hope, the only hope of sinners. Why, this is going to be the song of the redeemed to all eternity: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us unto God by His blood,” because there is no other hope, no other way of redemption than this.

Redeemed – not “with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

So this will endear Christ to you, endear Him to you as the dear, dying Lamb of God. This will make Christ precious to you in all that He suffered and as He laid down His life in death. You will look right beyond this type here. You will go right beyond it all to Calvary and you will see the dear Lamb of God dying in agonies and in blood, and you will admire the love of His heart, that ever the incarnate Son of God should so love sinners as to be willing to die for them. “No man taketh it (My life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

That was a beautiful hymn we sang just now (228). One thing this evening that especially attracted me was this:

“The language of His dying breath,
See how she holds it fast!”

That is faith. What was the language of His dying breath? “It is finished.” “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.” What was finished? The law honoured. Justice satisfied. Every type and shadow fulfilled. The ransom price paid. The covenant of grace sealed with precious blood. Salvation obtained. The way opened into heaven itself. “It is finished.” There is nothing that can be added to it or taken from it. I say this with reverence, that all the work of the Holy Ghost in a sinner’s heart, though it is so vital, it can never add anything to the finished work of Christ.

“Think how loud thy dying Lord
Cried out, ‘It is finished!’
Treasure up that sacred word,
Whole and undiminished.”

You see, there is heaven in it.

“The language of His dying breath,
See how she holds it fast”

“‘It is finished,’ said the Lord,
In His dying minute;

Holy Ghost, repeat the word,
Full salvation's in it."

Beloved friends, these are the things that really matter and the only things that will really matter when you and I come to die. There is no hope, no salvation, no heaven, without them.

But you see, we view the dear Lamb of God bleeding, dying, agonising at Calvary. At length He dies. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." He is not a disappointed Saviour. All for whom He suffered are saved by His death. He died, was buried and rose again, but He ever lives and reigns in heaven, and that wonderful work of the dear Lamb of God on the cross makes atonement for Him. "It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him."

I go back to my early days spiritually, and how precious that word was – atonement – Christ satisfying divine justice, the holy Lamb of God bearing the curse and bearing it away, His precious blood, atoning blood, and a holy God, satisfied through the death of Christ, looking on a guilty sinner with acceptance. Now that is the atonement.

I think I am right in saying that although the word comes many, many times in the Old Testament, it only comes once in the New, and that is in Romans 5. "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Now beloved friends, that is it. Not just to read and sing and hear of Calvary and the atonement, but to receive the atonement in a guilty conscience to put away your sins.

You see this godly Israelite here, he wanted a personal interest in the blood. On the great day of atonement there was that lamb slain, the offering made for the whole of the Israel of God. But his burden, his exercise was this: *my sin, my standing for eternity, my relationship with Thee* – an urgent, pressing case. Real religion is so personal. So he comes with his offering, this lamb without spot and blemish, and there he offers it at the door of the tabernacle.

It is spoken of as a burnt offering. Now understand these things aright. The sin offering was an accursed thing. It represented Christ with all the sins of His people laid upon Him as He was made a curse for them, and that sin offering was carried and burnt without the camp. "Wherefore

Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.”

The burnt offering represented a completely different aspect of the death of Christ. That is as He offered Himself as a perfect offering to His eternal Father, an offering in which His Father was eternally well pleased. It was an offering of a sweet savour unto the Lord, something with which God the Father was pleased, with which He was satisfied – the burnt offering. There are both aspects of Christ’s death: the sin offering, made sin for His people, made a curse; but also the burnt offering, where the Father looks with delight on His own beloved Son and accepts Him, and accepts all His dear people in Him.

So this Israelite comes. It is the burnt offering, the lamb without blemish. He offers it at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.” There is that lamb bleeding, dying – solemn scene! And this offerer lays his hand upon the head of that dying lamb – that is, he identifies with it, as if he would say, “The sin is mine; the guilt is mine, not this innocent lamb’s. There it is, bleeding, dying, but all the desert, all the guilt, all the sin is mine.” And he identifies with that dying lamb, and as he lays his hand upon the head of that dying lamb, he there confesses his sin. The dying thief fulfilled this type in his dying moments. He put his hand by faith upon the head of the burnt offering. “We indeed justly.” There he confessed his sin. “But this Man” – the holy, harmless Lamb of God – “hath done nothing amiss.” And then he prayed, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” And he received that answer of love and mercy. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” The dear Redeemer, the holy Lamb of God, took the dying thief to glory that very day as the firstfruits of His atoning death.

“He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering,” confessing his sin, identifying himself with that lamb. You see, here is substitution. You know what a substitute is – one who takes the place of another. And the death of Christ was the death of a Substitute, Christ in the place of His people. The old divines used to emphasise it, Christ in the room, place and stead of His people. Some of them used to put it like this: Christ in the law place of His people. In simple language it is this: “He instead of me.”

“He took the dying traitor’s place,
And suffered in his stead;
For man (O miracle of grace!)
For man the Saviour bled.”

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust” – that is substitution – “that He might bring us to God.” “And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering,” seeing the substitutionary death of that lamb in his room, place and stead. He is the one who deserves to die, but the lamb dies in his place.

“And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.” You see, the vital thing here is the personal interest in it, a personal sense of need, a personal confession of guilt, a personal resting on the atonement that the Lamb has made. It was signified by this: “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.” In other words, that is the place where he rests. If you will, he leans upon the dying lamb all the weight of his sins and his soul and eternity. He puts his hand there. All the weight of his salvation rests upon that lamb. If this should perish, then he must fail. O but it never can. It never will. “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

This is one of the most beautiful emblems of faith in the whole of the Word of God. Faith is not just believing the Bible to be true. Faith is not just believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Faith is not just believing that Jesus died and rose again. Faith is not just believing that Jesus died to make the atonement. It *is* that, but it is more than that. There is this personal sense of need. There is this confession. There is this vital element of trust. That is putting your hand on the head of the burnt offering. There is this vital element of relying on Christ. None but Jesus. No other Lamb, no other blood, no other hope, no other way. “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.

O what a solemn scene this was! O but what wonderful provision, prefiguring the gospel that a guilty sinner was welcome, invited, to venture personally under a sense of his sin and guilt. He would not go unless he was conscious of his sin and need, but how welcome he was! But only in one way – bringing a lamb. And beloved, the only way you can ever be welcome before the throne of a holy God is if you bring a Lamb slain and amid all your imperfections and sins you present to a holy God a perfect

Christ and you say, “This is all my hope. This is all my trust. I have no other. If I perish, I must perish here.” But, “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

A beautiful emblem of faith, this is – this hand reached out, an empty hand, a sinful, guilty hand, yet relying only on the slain Lamb, hanging on Him, leaning on Him, trusting in Him. There is forgiveness in it, cleansing in it, salvation in it, heaven in it. Tell me, is there anyone who can come in here:

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin”?

Now that is the religion that will take you to heaven. “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Nothing in the sinner, everything in Christ.

You know, the groans of that dying lamb, they must have come with weight upon that confessing Israelite, and when you venture to Calvary with the dear Lamb of God your only plea, how His goodness in bleeding and dying will lead you to repentance. “Was it my sins that made Him groan? Is it my guilt that presses Him down? Were my sins so many thorns in His crown? If the soldier pierced His side, is it true that I have pierced Him through and through?” And there will be a soft heart. There will be repentance. It will be the place of humility. It will be the place of love. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

“He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him.” That is, the sacrifice is accepted. That is, the venturing sinner’s prayers are accepted – on one ground, through the Lamb. “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”

“It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” That is, his sins, however many, are all forgiven. His sins, however many, are all washed away and washed away for ever in the blood of the Lamb. Now this is our only hope, the only way of salvation, the only way to heaven, and my desire is that many of you might see such a beauty in the dear

Lamb of God that you should desire Him, such a beauty in His love, such a beauty in His atoning blood, and that you might be taught by the Holy Spirit your need of Him, your personal guilt, your need of repentance and faith, your need to be prepared for eternity, that you are unfit, unready, in yourself to die.

But may it come to this: that bringing of the sinner to Christ, the Holy Spirit bringing you, drawing you, in all your sin, all your guilt, with all your need to this dear, dying Lamb, there to rest your eternal all upon His sin-atoning death.

“Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death.”

“And it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”