

Leviticus 4. Oops I sinned again. 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

HG notes: You really should be enjoying the bishop's lent course. I hope that its going to be so good that we'll pick up on it again in September and develop the next part of it.

Welcome: What have you given up / taken up for Lent?

Worship: Psalm 51

Word:

1. Read Leviticus 4.1-5.13
2. Can anyone remember anything James said!
3. Sum up the first 3 sacrifices so far – can you do it in one word for each? I'd quite understand if you felt the need to review some of them! (I liked Conversion, Commitment, Celebration – can you see why, can you better it?)
4. Can you give a one word summary of this Sacrifice (it doesn't have to begin with "C"?)
5. Read 1 John 1.8-2.2. Why did I pick this as the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading?
6. the 4<sup>th</sup> sacrifice is sometimes called the Purification sacrifice. How does 1 Jn reading relate to that?
7. What is the sin of omission? (how unintentional are your sins of omission!)
8. What is the 2<sup>nd</sup> example trying to get at (Lev5.2,3)
9. 3<sup>rd</sup> example? (Lev5.4)
10. Why are there different sacrifices for different ranks in society? Does the sacrifice relate to the sin and how bad the sin was Or to the person who has become aware of his or her sin?
11. How would you go about making someone aware of their sin?

Works:

Pray for a healing of our conscience, an opening of our eyes, a humble spirit to hear from God, perhaps from others.

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**Oops I sinned again.** I bet that's never happened to you. I'm sure that once you became a Christian you were all good, you didn't do any sinning at all!

Over these last few weeks we've been looking at the very ancient Jewish sacrifices of Leviticus and we've been looking at them to **see if they help us understand** anything about the human condition, anything about Jesus and about our lives today.

And we found in **Leviticus** Chapter 1 – the **burnt** offering – we found that **God wants to be a part of our lives** and He wants us to be a part of His life and He is so keen for that to happen that He doesn't want any thing to prevent us from drawing close to Him. So God says **When**, When you want to draw close to me this is how you do it. In the burnt offering we saw the **worshipper leaning on the lamb** and confessing his sins. The bloody mess that follows told the worshipper that his **sins were covered over**, they were atoned for. And all the sin was burned up. And we remembered how Jesus is described as the **Lamb of God who takes away** the sin of the world, how on the cross as Jesus dies, His last words were **It is finished**. And we learned that through the death of Jesus our sins are forgiven.

Okay, Now that my sins are forgiven, **I'm so excited** that I want to offer to God my very self. And no animals were hurt with the **Grain Offering** – fine flour and crushed incense and we saw that **this is my tribute** to God, you are my Lord and my God, this is the prayer of **commitment** and God said Put some **salt** on it – let it last forever. So my sins are **forgiven**, I've **committed** my life to Jesus. Go Home, that's it, shows over!

But wait **I'm so excited** about being at **Peace** with God that I want to **celebrate** that – so God says Well, **IF** If you'd like to then lets have a party - the Peace or **Fellowship Offering** – and that's when God took away all the nasty entrails and **fat** and we got to keep all the good stuff - We saw how **God loves us so much** that He wants to help us stay away from things that would **lead us into sin** – Give it all to me and let's burn it up! And then we saw that God wants to **encourage** and **sustain** us and we saw that in the way that God gave to the worshipper **lots of the good meat** from the sacrifice.

And the idea here is a **celebration of life and of peace**. As Christians we really don't party enough and maybe that was the main point of the last sermon! We should party more! And let people know why we're excited and why we're rejoicing. We have good reasons to rejoice! Through Jesus we are at Peace with God. That's good news. Now what happens next is **spoken to the people of God**. It's spoken to people who should know better! And it starts: **When**. So God, it would seem, is a **realist** – **When you sin** then do this. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sacrifice it is called the SIN offering.

The first thing we learn today is **God loves to give second chances**. God's grace, His forgiveness – its all there to cover over our sins.

If you are sharp eyed the next thing you will notice is this word **Unintentional**, accidental, error, go astray. And if you've got a legal mind you'll be thinking 'What counts as an *Unintentional Sin*?' The text goes on to say this is one of those sins that you're **not aware** of having committed. You're so used to **swearing** that you don't notice when you offend someone. You're throwing your arms around and don't notice that you **knock over** someone else's drink.

Chapter 5 vs 1 gives us some **examples** for how the ancient Israelites thought it might be used – the first relates to **not speaking up** when you should have spoken. Someone is accused of something and you knew something about the case and you didn't say anything. The first example relates to the Sin of **Omission** – this is about what you **did not do**. Some Christians can be very proud about **what it is that they don't do** – they don't smoke, they don't drink alcohol, they don't drive over the speed limit, they don't swear and so on and so on – and that's great **well done you** but its also terrifically shallow.

If the **boundaries of your faith** are marked out by what you **don't do** then you're no fun at all and actually you're way off where the gospel is – Jesus said that we are to Love the Lord your God , Love your neighbour as yourself (Mt22.37-39) **Do unto others** as you would have them do unto you (Mt7.12) – its proactive.

'All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing' (Edmund Burke 1729-97). The first example of sin we're given is the sin of omission, the **sin of apathy**, the sin of **let someone else** do it, the sin of **not mucking in**.

This is 4<sup>th</sup> sacrifice deals with Unintentional sin – but if your response to that is legalistic: **so if I didn't mean** to sin does that mean I can get away with it? If I slap you really hard and then say Oops there was a **fly on your cheek** – can that be counted as an unintentional sin? What can I get away with?

And if that's your attitude then you're looking for **the Law** and if you want Law then you're going to have to go back to the Old Testament properly. Jesus has come, **not to do away with the Law** but to **fulfill** it (Mt5.17) and we find in Jesus someone who completely fulfills the Law and all these sacrifices – especially this one – the **Sin Offering**. The **Next example** that Leviticus 5 gives us is about **touching ceremonially unclean** things – that's all about having a casual attitude to worship and to God.

You know God doesn't like it when you do that, if you're thinking **Yeah well so what?** God loves me and He'll forgive me anyway, then you ought to know that **that still counts** as sin. If this is your attitude to the Lord God almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, what's your **attitude** going to be like with **other people**. If you can't be **trusted in worship** – how are you going to be trusted in looking after people's possessions (see next week!) – how are you going to be trusted at all? And then there's the **rash oath** (Lev5.4) – Who here has said Let's **do Lunch**, I'll remember you in my prayers, I promise I'll sort it! No wonder Jesus said Let your **yes be yes** and your no be no. (Mt5.37) If the first sin was about being slow to speak up, this is about being **too rash in speaking out**.

What do you need? You **no longer** have that **peace** with God, you've allowed **sin to litter** your life, **like a smog to fog up your ability to see God** and find your way through life;

You need to get back with God again. We need to keep short accounts with God.

So the ancient Israelite would come and **do the Sin Offering**. Now we're learning this morning that Unintentional Sin still needs a sacrifice –

I accidentally stand on your **lego toy**, I break your lego toy, that **upsets you**, my foot is screaming and everyone is in tears. I could have a go at **putting all the blame on you** for leaving the toy there. I could put all the blame **on me**, I should have had a torch on, I should have been more careful watching my feet.

Most likely we will share the blame, that will mean we will have to have a **hug and say sorry** to each other and we'll have to spend the next half hour putting the lego back together again.

Unintentional Sin **still hurts** – just because it was accidental, just because you did not know that you had caused offence, that **doesn't make it okay**. Just because your conscience is not ringing alarm bells – that doesn't matter at all. **A sin is a sin** and it doesn't matter whether it's the sort of sin that you know about or the sort that you don't. It doesn't matter **whether you think** it's a big deal or whether your conscience is **so seared** that you don't think it's an issue at all. **Unintentional sin still hurts** and still needs dealing with and we need our sins to be atoned for whether we feel sinful and guilty or whether we don't.

**So far** all the sacrifices have been open to everyone – if you're **rich bring a bull**, if you're really poor then maybe a couple of pigeons – God is keen to have everyone draw near in worship.

But now the **rules change**. If you're the **High Priest** then lets have a bull, if we as a community come to realize that we've sinned, God says Lets have a bull, if the Leader sins then a **male goat**, if its just an ordinary punter then a female goat will be fine and if you're struggling with that then maybe it should be a couple of **pigeons** (Lv5.7) and if that's too much then **let it be some fine flour** (Lv5.11).

So we're supposed to be learning something about the **seriousness of sins** that we may not know about.

On Sundays we confess general confessions and I often think that that's a **bit weak** and pathetic and that we ought to have a **long period of silence** and really confess sins that we remember – but then frankly if there are any sins that you remember – you really **should have dealt** with them already – you should have already said **your Sorry to God**. Keep short accounts with God. Maybe its good that we have this **general confession** – so that we can confess to God **an awareness** that we **don't know ourselves** that well, we do make mistakes.

I bet there are all sorts of sins that I do and I am simply blind to them. I do apologize to you. If you feel the need to point them out to me, please do so but do it gently!

And we're learning that **God takes our unintentional** sins seriously and He considers the kind of role and influence we have – are you a priest? Are you a leader – well the sacrifice is that **much more**. We use this excuse that everyone is doing it – well that sounds like a **sacrifice that the whole community** should be offering up.

So the seriousness of the **sin goes up with the width** and influence that you have. Other people look at you and say Well if its okay for him or her to do it, (if its ok for the Vicar, the parish councilor, the home group leader, the Christian in the office) then **I guess I can** get away with it too.

And of course you're sitting there and saying, **at least I'm not a priest!** But St Peter said 1PE 2:9 'But you are a chosen people, a royal **priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God'.

So Peter would disagree with you. You might not be the vicar when you go into the pub **but everyone knows you're a Christian**. You can't suddenly start acting differently. These unintentional sins matter. They **affect other people** and they **infect our relationships** with each other and with God.

So **even Sins that I don't know** about – they matter – and they matter a lot – even more so according to our influence and role model situation in life – **But God** even in ancient times provided every stratosphere of society the **way to get right** with God, to have our sins covered over, atoned for. Even some flour for the very poorest people.

What do I do then? **I lean on the Lamb**. I bring my sacrifice, I confess my unintentional sin, I lean on the lamb and offer it to God as my sacrifice. And the priest takes the sacrifice and says **Go home, go in peace, your sins are atoned for**. We're done here. This spoken absolution from the priest, this **promise of God's written word**, this is what we need to hear to know that our sin has been dealt with and that **we have peace again** with God.

We turn to Jesus and we **pray** – Lord there are all sorts of sins that I don't even know about, **I'm sorry, help me!** We turn to Jesus and we say Lord **I messed up again**, I was doing so well and I did it again. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry **not just** for my **sin**, I'm sorry for all the **other people** who I've hurt in the process, I'm sorry for the people who saw me sin and got the wrong idea of who you are and what it means to be close to you. I'm sorry.

And we need to **hear God's absolution** and to know, our sins are atoned for.

**Rob Bell** tells the story of a **Woman** who was getting **visions** from Jesus and the Bishop didn't like it and he called to her and said Next time you have a vision from Jesus ask Him what I confessed to Him in my last confession. Aha, clever you see! Time went by and a little later on the woman started talking about her visions and the bishop called her and said Okay, remember me? And the woman said Yes, I saw Jesus and I asked Him. Jesus, what did the Bishop confess to you when he last came and confessed. And she took the Bishop's hands in hers and she said This is what Jesus told me, **Jesus said I don't remember**. I don't remember

That's it. You confessed your sins and I don't now remember what they were. They are atoned for, covered over, forgiven, the **blood of Jesus** has done all that.

Jesus hears your confession and He says to you **Go in peace**. And then He says I don't remember your sins. I don't remember. Amen.