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If is God is holy, what happens when I fail? (Leviticus 16:1-22, NIV '11)

INTRO:

I recently read an article from an Old Testament scholar who spent ten years studying the Book of Leviticus. After ten years, he made four key observations.¹

1. Leviticus helps us hunger for God's holiness more frequently.
2. Leviticus helps us fear God more greatly.
3. Leviticus helps us love Jesus more deeply.
4. Leviticus helps us love our neighbors more fully.

Based on those observations, his ultimate conclusion was, "We need more Leviticus." That's why over the past few weeks we've looked to Leviticus to answer questions like:

- * *Does my spirituality matter to God?*
- * *Does how I conduct business matter to God?*
- * *Does my sexuality matter to God?*
- * *Does the kind of neighbor I am matter to God?*

Today, we want to answer a very important question, *If God is so holy, what happens when I fail?* Before we go any further, I want to pause for a moment and pray—PRAYER.

TRANSITION:

Galatians 3, in the New Testament, says, *23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:23-26, NASB).*

The Law does two things. Number one, it tells us about God's holiness. We've seen that throughout Leviticus. But in doing so, number two, it reminds us our sin. And by reminding us of our sin, the Law constantly shows us how we fall short of God's standard. But Galatians tells us that was part of God's design. Paul says the Law served as a tutor. It taught us that we needed someone else's help.

¹ <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/four-things-happen-when-study-leviticus-ten-years>

Even though Leviticus was written some 1400 years before Christ walked this earth, it points us to Jesus. It gives us glimpses of what Jesus would later do for us. In fact, there might not be a chapter in the Bible that gives us a clearer picture of what Christ accomplished on the cross than Leviticus 16. Leviticus 16 describes the Day of Atonement or perhaps as you've heard it called *Yom Kippur*. *Yom* is the Hebrew word meaning "day." *Kippor* is the Hebrew word meaning "atonement" or "to cover," i.e. the forgiveness of sins. It was the most important day on the Jewish calendar. In the Old Testament it occurred every year on the 10th of Tishri, which is around the September/October timeframe for us.

TEXT:

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD.

- * Immediately we are confronted with a holy God who cannot be approached just in any way we see fit. You may remember that the first week of this series we looked at Leviticus 10, which tells the story of young Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron the priest. They offered what the Bible calls unauthorized fire before the LORD—basically they tried to manipulate God or treat Him like a genie—they approached without the proper respect and they lost their lives. Here, in chapter 16, God wants Aaron and all the people to understand that as sinful people we much enter God's presence in a particular way. If we don't, there are consequences.

2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover (Leviticus 16:1-2, NIV '11).

- * In the Old Testament God allowed His presence to dwell in a Tent called the Tabernacle. We've talked about the Tabernacle throughout this series. But even within the Tabernacle, God's presence dwelled uniquely over the atonement cover of the Ark, which sat in the innermost room of the Tabernacle, called the Most Holy Place. Only the high priest could enter into that room and he could only do so one day each year—on the Day of Atonement—when God would deal with the sins of His people for the upcoming year.

3 "This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on.

- ✓ The Day of Atonement began with the high priest taking a bath. Some traditions tell us he would bathe up to 5x and wash his hands a total of 10x before entre God's presence.

- ✓ After his bath, the priest would put on very modest clothing, an undergarment made of linen and then an outer covering made of white linen with a simple sash. Typically, the high priest wore an elaborate outfit, very colorful and majestic. But on this day he would put on humble clothes as a reminder that he was preparing to enter the very presence of God.²

5 From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 6 "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. 7 Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 8 He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. 9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat (Leviticus 16:3-10, NIV '11).

- * That's a lot to take in and can be pretty confusing, which is why I've brought a few friends to help me explain [bring out the stuffed goats]. I asked the eldership about using real goats but they thought that'd be a baaaaaaaaad idea!
- * Leviticus 16 says that the high priest would take two goats and present them to the LORD at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Then he would cast lots for the two goats. We don't know exactly what casting lots means—it might have been like rolling dice, drawing straws, or paper-rock-scissors—but somehow they would choose one goat and set it aside as a sacrifice to God and the other goat would then be sent into the wilderness as a **scapegoat**—some of your Bible translations might say sent away to Azazel.³

Here's what would happen next—*15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain⁴ and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.⁵ 16 In this way he will make*

² Because the priest could not look directly upon God's presence, when he entered the room he would light incense. The smoke from the incense would fill the Tabernacle and block his view of the Ark and atonement cover to keep him safe.

³ I wish we had time to talk about the significance of that name this morning, but we'll have to do that at another time. Regarding Azazel there are three main theories. First, the term may simple be a descriptive name for the goat, i.e. "the one set apart for release" (i.e. scapegoat). Second, the term may describe the remote, forbidden place where the sin-laden goat went. Years later they actually started having the goat's escort push the goat over the side of a mountain—you don't want to wake up a week later and find this goat chewing grass in your backyard. Third, the term may be the name of a demon the Israelite people believed lived deep in the wilderness.

⁴ Inner curtain separated off the rest of the tabernacle from the most precious room, sometimes called the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place, the place where God's presence lived in a unique, mysterious way.

⁵ The atonement cover was the top slab on the Ark of the Covenant—the exact location where God's Spirit settled. Other portions of Leviticus explain that when the priest would enter he'd have to burn incense and fill the room w/ smoke because if he even caught a glimpse of the Presence of God he would die instantly.

atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17 No one is to be in the tent of meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel (Leviticus 16:15-17, NIV '11).

Aaron would take the first goat, which was dedicated to God, slaughter it and then sprinkle its blood on the atonement cover. This was to make atonement or secure forgiveness for the sins of the people (so this goat is finished). Then, 20 *“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. 21 He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:20-22, NIV '11).*

- * Once the priest had killed the first goat and sprinkled its blood on the altar, he would then take the second goat, lay his hands on its head and confess the sins of the people. You’ll notice the Bible uses three different terms to describe these sins—wickedness, rebellion, and then the plain old word, sin—together these words describe every type of sin, whether the sin was accidental or intentional, whether it involved thought or action—the idea is that all the sin of people is going on to this one goat
- * Then—and I love this part—some poor chap gets the job of leading this goat waaaay out into the wilderness all by himself. I wonder how that conversation went? *Bob, we got a job for you. // Oh yeah, what? // Well, you see we’re going to transfer all the sins of our people—all the wickedness and greed and deceit—onto the head of some poor goat // Sounds creepy. // Yeah // What do you need me to do? // Well, Bob, your job is to escort the creepy goat far out into the wilderness, alone all by yourself, and make sure it never comes back.* Later accounts actually say the guy started pushing that goat over a cliff just to make sure the job was done. Think about it—the last thing you want is to wake up the next day and find the sin goat eating grass in your backyard.

TRANSITION:

So here’s what you have to understand—on the Day of Atonement there was first **death** and then there was **separation**. There was the death of the first goat and then separation of sin through the release of the second goat (get it as far away as possible). This ceremony was designed to cleanse the people from their sins for an entire year. But here’s the question. Why all the fuss? Why the elaborate ordeal? Why all the blood? Did it really have to go down like this or **could God have done it another way? What is God trying to tell us?**

DEATH AND SEPARATION:

Let's step for a moment and look at the bigger picture. You may remember that in the Book of Genesis, God creates the entire world, including man and woman, and God calls the world "good." The Bible says at that time the man and woman were both naked and they "felt no shame." That's a Hebrew way of saying they had nothing to hide, nothing to be afraid of, nothing to regret. They were totally at peace in their own skin, but when sin came into their life the Bible says that they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves. What before was once a relationship defined by total comfort and honesty, is now a relationship defined by lies, shame, and hiding. Sin does the same thing to us—it ruins our innocence, it causes us to hide and save face. It wrecks relationships. We know this all too well.

In response to that first act of sin, check out what God does – **21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:21-24, NIV '11).**

- * From the moment sin first entered into God's creation, a sacrifice was needed to undo its effects. Adam and Eve had made clothes out of fig leaves but God said, "No, that's not good enough." God slaughtered an animal and made His own clothes for the man and woman. **Here's the message—we can't take care of our own sin. God has to do it for us.** God sacrifices an animal and then he forces the man and woman out of His presence. Just like in Leviticus there is **death** and **separation**.
- ✓ Now whether you're a Christian, a seeker, or a skeptic what's happening in Genesis 3 and Leviticus resonates with something deep inside of us. You and I may not sacrifice animals anymore, but we do live in a world where almost 60 countries practice some form of the death penalty. I'm not arguing for or against capital punishment, I'm simply pointing out that even in our day the majority of people live under a government that says if someone commits a crime heinous enough the only just punishment is that their life is taken from them.
- ✓ Now let's bring it even closer to home. When someone hurts us or sins against us what happens? We don't take their life, but at the very least we put separation between ourselves and the other person. Sometimes the separation is permanent for our own safety. Often times it's temporary to allow for healing. Even when we have argument, what do we do? We move to other rooms for a bit to "give each other space."

- * So even in our day sin, at times, results in death and it almost always involves some form separation. And that's just for when sin takes place between sinful people. Imagine what sin looks like from the perspective of a holy God. Imagine how painful sin must be for Him. And imagine how big of a problem sin is for us when we're the ones who are guilty.

TRANSITION:

It's into this scenario that Jesus steps in and brings us hope. The Day of Atonement is a foreshadowing, of what God would later accomplish for us through Christ. In the Old Testament, God punished the people's sin through death of one goat and then expelled the sin from the community through of a second goat. In the New Testament, Jesus does both for us. Jesus takes the punishment for our sin and then he separates us from our sin. Let me show you this in the New Testament. Turn with me to Romans 3.

NEW TESTAMENT:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (3:23-26, ESV).

- * When the Bible says that God put Jesus forward as a *propitiation* it means God took His wrath against sin out on Jesus instead of us.⁶ Propitiation means to release your wrath on something. That's important. God wants to punish sin. If He didn't, He wouldn't be just. But God also wants to forgive our sin because He's loving. So here's the beautiful thing—through Christ, God shows himself to be just because He *punishes* our sin on the cross. But he also shows himself to be the justifier because he *removes* our sin through the cross.
- ✓ You see, because of sin, you and I deserve **death** and **separation**. Not just physical death but what the Bible describes as the “second death.” The “second death” is eternal separation from God. But because of the cross we don't get what we deserve—we get the opposite of what we deserve. That's called grace. That means whatever your past—whatever regret, wrongdoing, poor decisions, blown opportunities, Jesus has taken care of it and then some. On the cross:
 - Jesus took your punishment so you could receive his mercy.

⁶ The word for propitiation in Romans 3 is actually same word used to describe the Atonement Cover on top of the Ark in Leviticus 16:15. In fact, it says right here in Romans 3:23-26 that in the past—back in the Old Testament—God passed over sin in order that He could later fully deal with our sin through Christ. That means what took place way back in Leviticus was actually pointing us towards what God would later do in Jesus Christ.

- Jesus was separated from God so that you could be brought near to God.⁷
- Jesus took your sin so you could receive his righteousness. Paul says it this way, **21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV '11).**
- ✓ That's the Gospel. Jesus switched places with you. He takes your mess and gives you His peace. He takes your shame and gives you His joy. He took your death and gives you His life. Jesus became your scapegoat.
- * And here's the best part. Jesus' sacrifice isn't temporary like the sacrifices in Leviticus. The Day of Atonement happened annually because the impact only lasted for a year. God used that ceremony for a period of time to prepare us for the coming of Christ. But the impact of Christ's sacrifice lasts forever—**24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. 25 Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, 26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:24-28, ESV).**

CONCLUSION:

Understand, grace comes freely to us, but it didn't come cheaply for God. God the Father sacrificed His own Son. Jesus Christ sacrificed His own life. All we have to do is humbly accept that gift. On the Day of Atonement the people humbled themselves by cleaning themselves up and offering the prescribed sacrifices. But now, because of the cross, we humble ourselves by simply bringing our mess to Jesus and trusting His sacrifice to clean us up.

Jesus invites you to simply come as you are. You don't have to make yourself good before you come to Jesus. In fact, you can't. You just come. During these next few moments here's what I want you to do. Write down names of someone you know who needs a relationship with Jesus. Maybe that person is you. Let the words of this song speak peace into your soul.

Prayer → Crowder, "Come as you are"⁸ → Invitation → Come to the altar to pray for the names you wrote down or come talk to someone if you have a decision to follow Jesus.

⁷ **19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise (Hebrews 10:19-22, NLT).**

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjgioXrnEME> – use from 0:21 to 4:36

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