May the Holy Spirit give you a greater understanding of the love Christ has for you!

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

Hebrews 10:23

If anyone asks why we have hope while living in this world, our quick and sure answer is Jesus. We have hope in Him because of the promises He has made. We have eternal life coming, dwelling in perfect holiness with God. Sin and the damage it causes will no longer exist. Pain and worry and every tear will be gone.

Even in this life, He promises to be with us. And if we love Him, He will work all things to our good. The pain we experience here will simply prepare us to be in paradise.

How can we believe these things? Because God is the One who has promised them and He is faithful. He will never leave one of His promises unfulfilled. He is God. We need never be ashamed of having our hope in Him.

In Christ’s love

John

10-10-21

Leviticus 23:26-32

The Day of Atonement is the sixth of the seven special holy celebrations that the LORD ordained for His people Israel. The first four took place in the spring of the year and they foreshadowed something that Jesus has already fulfilled through His atoning death, His resurrection, and by Him sending the gift of the Holy Spirit. The remaining three feasts tell us of things that Jesus will fulfill in the future.

Last week, we looked into the Feast of Trumpets, which takes place on the first day of the seventh month of the Jewish year in the fall. This will be fulfilled when Jesus comes back to claim His church and when He returns to rule the earth. The Bible is very clear that these occurrences will be accompanied with the sound of trumpets from heaven.

We mentioned that the Feast of Trumpets reminded the people that the Day of Atonement was coming in just ten days, and this began a time of preparation, referred to as the Ten Days of Repentance. The Day of Atonement was a very important day for the people of Israel and we can tell by our Scripture reading that God took it very seriously.

This day was instituted by God shortly after the death of two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. Nadab and Abihu had been ordained as priests along with their father Aaron. But they brought fire that had not been authorized by God, put incense on it and offered it to the LORD. Because they did not treat the LORD as holy by following His commands, they were immediately destroyed by fire. This story is in Leviticus 10.

The Day of Atonement involved the priest coming before the LORD in the most holy place in the tabernacle. The priest had to realize that he would be on holy ground and that he had to take it very seriously. The recent happening to Nadab and Abihu would be fresh in Aaron’s mind as they began this celebration while they were still wondering in the wilderness.

Remember how the tabernacle was set up. It had an outer courtyard where the sacrifices took place on the alter and where the bronze sea was for the priests to wash. Stepping into the tabernacle brought one into what was called the “holy place”. This room contained the table of show bread, the golden oil lamp, and the alter of incense. Only the priests were allowed to enter the holy place.

There was a smaller room at the back of the holy place and this was called the “most holy place” or the “holy of holies”. The most holy place was separated from the holy place by a heavy veil. This is the veil that was later torn in two at Jesus’ death. The most holy place contained the ark of the covenant. The most holy place could only be entered by the high priest one day per year: the Day of Atonement.

The main point of the Day of Atonement was for the atoning of sins for the nation of Israel. This required blood sacrifice to put the years’ worth of sins away from Israel. This was different from the individual sacrifices offered by people throughout the year for their personal sins.

The procedure that had to be followed is given in Leviticus 16. It is quite long and I invite you to read it sometime. For now, I will give you an overview of what was to take place. Right at the start of these instructions, God tells Moses to tell Aaron that he is not to enter the most holy place just any time he wants to or else he will die.

The first thing Aaron, and then all the high priests that came after him, had to do was to wash himself and then dress entirely in linen garments. His first sacrifice was a bull and a ram. The ram was a burnt offering that was entirely given to the LORD. The Bull was sacrificed as a sin offering. The high priest would take fire from the alter in the courtyard and some incense into the holy place and offer it on the alter of incense. He would then take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the ark of the covenant and in the most holy place. All this atoned for the sins of the high priest and his family.

The next part of the atonement required two goats. The high priest would bring the goats before the door to the tabernacle and cast lots for them. One goat would be sacrificed for a sin offering. The blood of this goat would be taken into the holy of holies and sprinkled there and on the ark of the covenant. This was actually an atonement for the tabernacle from being exposed to the sinful people of Israel. The blood of the bull and the goat were also applied to the horns of the alter in the courtyard; again, atoning for the exposure to the sin of the people.

The high priest would place his hands on the head of the goat that was still alive and confess the sins and iniquities of the people of Israel. He was known as the scapegoat. A man would then lead the goat out into the wilderness and release it. In this way, it carried off the sins of the people. Upon returning, this man had to wash himself and his clothes before coming back into the camp. In this way, no sin was brought back in that had been removed.

The high priest had to remove his linen garments and place them in the holy place and then wash himself again. Another man took whatever remained of the bull and the goat to a place outside the camp and burned them. These were sin offerings and the sin was to be removed from the camp. This man also had to wash himself and his clothes before he returned into the camp.

This ceremony atoned for the sins of the high priest and his family, the people of Israel, and atoned for the tabernacle and all its furnishings due to being among unclean people. This was to be held once per year, on the tenth of the seventh month, the month of Tishri.

As we consider all that takes place, it’s easy to see Jesus all through this ceremony. Additionally, the book of Hebrews is very helpful in understanding how ineffective this was at cleansing sin and how it had to be Jesus who truly brought atonement to the world. Jesus is the one who offered the perfect sacrifice of Himself and then at His ascension, He entered the true most holy place, the throne room of God.

One thing to notice is that the high priest entered the most holy place twice; once for his own sins and once for the sins of the people. Jesus only had to enter once. He did not have to enter to cleanse Himself because He was already perfectly clean. Jesus had to enter in order to atone for the sins of the people.

The high priest was required to enter with the blood of a sacrifice; a sin offering. Hebrews 9:11-12, “*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption*.”

So, Jesus is our permanent high priest as the book of Hebrews makes clear in other places. He entered the perfect tabernacle which is heaven. Remember that the earthly tabernacle is a copy of the one in heaven. Jesus entered with blood; but it was His own blood and not the blood of something else. And Jesus was a sin offering, just like the bull and the goat; He was sacrificed to atone for sin. And it is so important with the Gospel to understand that Jesus’ sacrifice never needs repeated; He atoned for all sin.

Hebrews 10:4 tells us, “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*.” If the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement didn’t really take away sins, what was the point of it? The best way to think of it is that the animal sacrifices *covered* the sins. They were covered and thus were out of God’s sight, so to speak. In this way, God could be among His people. The guilt of the sins was still there because they had not been punished; God’s justice had not been satisfied.

When Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was sacrificed, not only was His blood shed, but the wrath of God was poured out on Him. He took the punishment of all the sins so that the justice of God was satisfied. With the blood of Christ, sins were truly removed along with guilt, and we are then truly cleansed and can be in God’s presence.

The high priest placed his hands on a goat and ceremonially put the sins of the people upon it. It was then led out into the wilderness and forgotten. The word “scapegoat” is used today to indicate someone who may have been innocent but ended up taking the blame for something. Jesus became our scapegoat. All our sin, all our blame, was placed upon Him. The difference is that it wasn’t symbolic like the goat; it was real. Jesus actually carried off our sins into forgetfulness.

Psalm 103:12 “*As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us*.” Remember that on the earth, if you go north far enough, you will eventually start going south. But if you head east, you will always be heading east. East and west are infinitely far apart which is how far God has cast our sins from us in Jesus Christ.

Also, Hebrews 10:17 tells us, “*And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*.” As part of our acceptance of Christ as Saviour, we confess that we are sinners. As we go through life and continue to fail, we continue to confess and repent. Confession and repentance are something we do as Christians; this is following the command of Jesus. But it is the work of Jesus on the cross that has brought us forgiveness and our sins are forgiven.

If some past sin comes to mind and you start dwelling on it and feeling guilty all over again, that is from satan. You have been forgiven and God has forgotten the sin. That doesn’t mean that we forget our sins. Remembering them will help us avoid the temptation to repeat them.

The remains of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp to be disposed of. Again, the book of Hebrews helps us to understand in verses 13:11-12, “*For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate*.” Remember that Jesus was taken outside the city to be crucified.

The author of Hebrews then invites us to join Jesus outside the camp; outside the gates of the city of the world. We belong within the walls of the heavenly city, the Kingdom of God, where Jesus is now. There is our citizenship, won by the work of Christ on the cross.

Hebrews has another way of showing us that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were, of themselves, not enough to save us; and that the sacrifice of Jesus was. Hebrews 10:11-12, “*Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God*.” Jesus sat down; there is no need for Him to ever offer a sacrifice again because His was perfect.

Now, as we consider all these things, it appears that Jesus has already fulfilled these things we’ve talked about. And He has. So what’s left to be fulfilled? We just read the passages that talk about Jesus sitting down, but these are followed by “*waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet*.” Jesus isn’t going to sit there forever.

When the high priest had finished all he was to do for the Day of Atonement, he left the most holy place and went back out among the people. Jesus hasn’t left the most holy place yet. The day will come when He will leave the most holy place of heaven and return to earth to be among His people. That’s when He will completely fulfill the Day of Atonement.

Prayer

Precious Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; only begotten Son of God the Father; we Your people worship You and praise You for the complete atonement You made on our behalf. Your sacrifice made unnecessary the sacrifices of the Mosaic law. They were perfect, but performed by imperfect people. You lived the Law in its entirety and so fulfilled it.

We await Your Kingdom. We know that at the appointed time, all Your enemies will be placed under Your feet, and the Father will send You to earth to establish the Kingdom that is rightfully Yours. We pray for that day; looking forward to Your righteous rule.

In asking for Your Kingdom to come, we realize that we must be ready. We must be prepared to become Your subjects during Your reign. We ask that Your Holy Spirit prepare us, so that we will be unashamed upon Your arrival.

In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray

Amen