

Christ in the Sacrifices 15-05-17a

This is Sunday, the 17th of May, 2015. In our Sunday morning study we are looking at Christ in the Sacrifices. It is a New Testament study located almost entirely in the Old Testament.

We are going to resume this morning in Genesis chapter 4 verses 1 and following. We'll take a moment as we begin to spend a few moments in individual prayer, which gives each of us an opportunity to go before the Lord and dedicate our time and our concentration, our fellowship, what we say and what we think, and the expectation that God is going to nourish our souls with the truth of His Word, to thank Him for the things that He has done that allow us to exercise this privilege and to come before Him in Christ together. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful as the occasion arises week by week to make a point of gathering together in the name of the Lord Jesus, to spend time acknowledging the debt of love that we owe to Your grace in sending Him to be our Savior, our sacrifice, our Redeemer.

The tremendous privileges that we enjoy now as being in Him and having the right to come before You and address ourselves to You, both individually and collectively as we do this morning. We pray Your blessing on us as we look at this portion of Your Word and seek a better understanding and appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ in His role as the atonement that bridges the gap between ourselves in our fallen condition and Yourself in the heavenly realms in perfect righteousness and holiness. We pray that as a result of looking at these things each one of us will have opportunity to reflect and to live our lives more fully conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus in service to You and in expectation of the ages to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We looked in the introductory sessions of our study of Christ and the sacrifices at the concept of animal sacrifice in particular.

Sacrifice in general is a very ancient practice and depending on who you talk to there is a range of theories about how it originated. I know how it originated. You know how it originated.

All peoples are descended from the same original caste members in the human race and God introduced the concept of substitution and of bridging a gap. There are two fundamental concepts that pretty much anybody who looks at the idea of sacrifice will acknowledge and that is that it is a means of communication with the ineffable God or Gods in your pagan cultures that there is a distance. They exist in an unseen realm.

We exist in a seen realm and in some way the destruction of animals or vegetation as they are sent in the direction of this distance is a means of communication with the ineffable God or Gods in your pagan cultures that there is a distance. And so in almost every culture and in every philosophy involving sacrifice that which is sacrificed is two things. A. It is representative.

It is substitutionary. I can't travel this distance. I can't bridge this gulf and go and present myself before that which I worship.

So I am going to send a messenger who will carry my desire for communion, for restoration, for appeal. Bless my crops. Bless my family.

Bless my children. Bless my ancestors. Bless my aid and comfort requested from this deity or deities.

So there is this idea that it is a communication channel and in the same way that the noises coming out of the tiny speaker at the top of your cell phone aren't me when I call you. They represent me. The signal has traveled a distance from wherever I am and as you hear me speaking in that little tiny device the message has traveled an invisible distance and those vibrations represent me.

When you hear the vibrations of someone's voice you are basically talking to that person even though you are not in the room with them there is this substitution idea. I am not the cell phone but the cell phone represents me and communicates on my behalf across this distance. This is essentially the nature of what sacrifice is and the destruction idea to send it up via the flames you convert it into something invisible.

There was the thought in the ancient Egyptian burials in the pyramids that by killing all the servants and killing all the animals and making models and representations of earthly things and burying them with the embalmed corpse of the notable person a pharaoh or someone high up in the Egyptian government that all of these things being entombed and sealed within this pyramidal structure would somehow be conveyed to the afterlife. They didn't expect that King Tut was going to use his tiny toy chariot playing with it in the pyramid. They thought that by dedicating it and anointing it and placing it with copious amounts of religious ceremony in the tomb that these things would transmogrify themselves into the afterlife.

Representative here real there. Make sense? Representative here real there. And all of these things being entombed these notions actually partake of the original truths that God communicated in the concept of sacrifice.

The reason God said let's retire the fig leaf apron and let's use an animal skin and he clothes them. This is at the end of chapter 3. The Lord God is going to separate them from himself. And you would think well if the covering to hide their nakedness is for God's benefit and yet they're cast out of the garden then what do they need the covering for because they're no longer in his presence.

It is more than that. The covering of skins is something they are going to wear on a daily basis and the practicality of it isn't so much well I need to cover a physical nakedness God might come by and I don't want him gazing on my unclothed self. What's the purpose of the clothing? It is a daily reminder not that I picked some leaves and sewed them together but because of my choice to disobey and to disregard the instructions of God a price has been paid.

I am now separate from God and unable to dwell in the original unfallen state that required no

death and required no clothing. I'm separate from God and there are consequences in my world, in my horizontal life. Eventually these clothing of skins will deteriorate.

They last a lot longer than they leave but they will deteriorate and have to be replaced. More animals will have to die and it is a teaching tool. On this earth the physicality of sacrifice and of the necessary incursion that we make because we are sinful and because we are fallen on this world is a reminder that we need a solution to this problem.

Eventually it needs to be solved unless we are just going to strut and fret our hour on the stage and then keel over and turn to dust. There needs to be a resolution and so these things not only picture the present condition of separation and of what happens with sin which is death, separation, disconnection from God through disobedience, through disregard, through apathy, through lack of appreciation and worship. Separation from God inevitably results in death.

When Romans 3.23 says the wages of sin is death it sounds like well you sin and God is going to pay you back with a death. This is looking at it from the recipient point of view. Well I have sinned and I'm going to get paid with a death.

That's not what Romans 3.23 is talking about. We went through the book of Romans and if you remember in chapter 3 the wages of sin, this is what we have to pay. We are the payors not the payees.

We pay death. It costs us life when we sin. It costs others life when we sin.

We incur a debt which must be paid when we disobey God. So it isn't like well you've committed a sin and I'm going to hand you a check and as soon as you cash it you die. It is a debt I owe.

I owe life because disconnecting from God as we saw last time, He is the one and only source of life and to be disconnected from Him is all the same as taking a lamp and unplugging it from the wall. It cannot glow for more than a fraction of a second separated from the source of its energy. We cannot exist for more than a short space of time, the lifetime of human beings here separated from God.

Everything decays. Our physical bodies decay. Our soul and spirit corrupt and decay separated from God.

So sacrifice pictures that and represents it and to focus on the materiality of it and to worry about the animal in the sense of well that seems shocking and heinous that this animal is dying. It should be shocking and heinous but it should lead us back to these truths. Not to a campaign to stop animal sacrifice because it's cruel.

It should lead us to the feet of the Lord Jesus. It should lead us to the throne of God in heaven, recognizing that God built this into our world for a reason. This is the reason also that just our path through life costs.

When you eat a normal diet some of it comes from animals. Animals are corralled and they're farmed and they are raised and there is livestock and throughout the ancient world raising flocks and herds was a necessity. This is a staple of life.

They live to become food and sources of food and it is another reminder that because we no longer live in the garden, because we no longer have access to the fruit of the trees where nothing dies, we are fallen. And again it is necessary. It's sort of like when you think about the Lord's table and as the disciples in the upper room, Jesus breaks the bread and he says, this is my body which is broken for you.

Take, eat. And you think, well how shocking that I would take the body of the Lord Jesus and grind it between my teeth. This seems like a desecration.

This seems very shocking and I don't want to do it. The images of cannibalism come to my mind. If this is truly as the transubstantiation just heightens the shock.

What's the idea? Why did Jesus do that? Why didn't he say, let's dip the honey, let's drink some milk, something that doesn't involve death. Why do we grind it between our teeth? It is a reminder that we are responsible and accountable for the separation between ourselves and God. And this is a good thing.

It is good to be reminded. Many cultures, including a lot of the Native American cultures, when they would hunt and they would slay a deer or an antelope or something, before they partook of it, they would acknowledge the sacrifice made by this animal so that they and their family might live. And they would dedicate the thing to the Great Spirit or whatever understanding they had of invisible powers, but it was a recognition and a healthy one that we exist and because we exist in corruption there is a cost and a penalty involved.

There is a wage that has to be paid and that wage is death. Now, this is really good for humility. The purpose of it is humility.

I exist because other things die. And of course you can see the ultimate and absolute fulfillment of that in the Lord Jesus. We live because He died on our behalf.

That's the concept of sacrifice. We looked at it in some detail last time and we came up to the origins. The first animal to die, it wasn't a formal sacrifice in the sense of worship or religious rite, but the animals that died to provide Adam and Eve clothing were slain by God.

And it's difficult to think of another case where God is going to be the one doing the slaying. He has ordained that we do the slaying with our own hand. And we'll get into that a little more as we look at the formalization of the ritual sacrifices.

But you'll notice as we come historically forward to Genesis chapter 4, Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord. And this was an innovation. I think in the movie theater of the eternal future when God reruns the film of

history, this is something I really want to watch because Adam and Eve had wandered around for some indeterminate amount of time in the garden, but nobody has ever seen childbirth.

They have seen animals reproducing. But to experience it and to go through it yourself and say, this isn't just old bossy having a calf. This is Eve producing from within herself another human being and she is so impressed with that that that's pretty much what she names him, Cain.

I have acquired a man from the Lord and there's a word play there on acquired and Cain's name. Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Who's the firstborn son? Cain.

And here we begin the pattern of are you firstborn or are you not? Is there something unique and special about firstborn? And there is. And this is the first situation where you now have the birth order noted. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

The English translation here is a little bit prejudiced. I find this prejudice off-putting. I'm not a fan of prejudice.

I think we ought to judge things based on inherent qualities and not on pre-judging. But there's a prejudice here. Do you see it? The Hebrew conjunction wow, just the little shepherd's crook, is a multi-purpose conjunction.

And so when we render it into English, it's almost always an interpretation. Is it and, now, then, but, and, afterwards. And here you have two wows.

Wow, Abel was a keeper of the sheep. Wow, Cain was a tiller of the ground. But the way the English has put it is they're trying to kind of tip you to say, well, Abel was a keeper of the sheep, but Cain was a, there's no such prejudice in the original.

Abel was a keeper of the flocks. Cain grew crops. Flocks and crops.

Right? So there's a, this is kind of an English prejudice here. Now Abel was a keeper of the sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Nothing wrong with being a tiller of the ground.

And in the process of time it came to pass. In the process of time. This is a, an excruciatingly important detail.

And we will refer back to it in just a second. But note, in the process of time, time has passed. These men have lived lives extensively prior to the episode we're about to look at.

They didn't just walk out of the family camp one day and say, well, I've got my crop, I've got my animal. A long space of time has transpired. What happens in a space of time as people live lives? They form habits.

They establish priorities. They pursue goals. They develop, we develop and have characteristics and have attributes.

Things that are known of us. It takes time for that to emerge. So this is not an isolated episode as it comes up.

This is the result of a lot of things that have transpired in the process of time. This is going to reflect things that have taken place and have developed in the process of time. In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.

Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry and his countenance fell.

What is the fundamental thing we have established about the whole idea of sacrifice? This is the first acknowledged, labeled sacrifice, sacrificial occasion in the Bible. What do we know about sacrifice? What two things did I review? You think about God way off there, us here. What does the sacrifice do? It is representative.

It stands in for me. David says about his infant son that passed away, he cannot come to me. I can only go to him through death.

So there is this gulf, there is this distance, and since I can't go, something has to go in my place. It represents me, and I have a purpose in wanting to span that gulf in the first place. God is on the other side, and I want to commune, I want to communicate, I want to have some link with God.

People aren't going to sacrifice when they don't care if there's a God or not. I don't need to be represented to anybody. If I've got nobody to call, why would I carry a cell phone? Nobody's going to call me, why would I go to the expense? I have this communication means because it serves a desired purpose.

So what's going on here? When Cain brings of the fruit of the ground to the Lord, what's he doing? He is representing himself before God, right? And the sacrifice from his crops is the means. He's going to send that across as a message, as something that is going to go up by fire. Now, it says, Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat.

One of the immediate things we notice is that Cain's is a bloodless sacrifice. Cain's requires nothing in terms of slaying an animal, but Abel, on the other hand, to offer these animals has to slay them. Now, there is nothing wrong, and hear me closely, there is nothing wrong with a menka that is bloodless.

You go, when we get into the Levitical offerings, you get on to, I think it's Leviticus 3, and you get into the menka, there are grain offerings, there are heave offerings, wave offerings of the grain and so on. Does God say, wait a minute, you've got to dip that weed in blood before you, it's fine. There's nothing inherently wrong with that.

However, here, there is a problem related to the fact that it's not a blood sacrifice. Intrinsically

and inherently, there's nothing wrong with a food offering. However, keeping in mind the two things that we reviewed about sacrifice, there is a person being represented by substitution, and there is a message that is being sent, right? So, what would be helpful, and we'll develop this in some detail, but we need to preview coming attractions right now, and talk about the difference between a whole burnt offering, an animal offering, and a grain, cereal, food type of offering.

Because the two offerings carry different messages. It isn't just the fact that it's bloodless that makes Cain's offering a problem. It is the message that he is sending.

Because the grain offerings are fellowship offerings. They are, we are on good terms, and I am just here to express appreciation and to enter into fellowship. Everything is good.

The blood offerings are just, they are recognitions that we are sinful, that our sin incurs that penalty of separation and death, and this substitutionary offering in shedding its blood and having that presented before God, comes before God in the humility of acknowledgement that I have a problem. The serial offerings, when we get to Leviticus, you'll find they always accompany and follow animal sacrifices. It is along with, it isn't independent of.

It's a fine sacrifice if you have laid the groundwork. If you yourself have already developed, established, reflected, and acknowledged that sacrificial aspect, that confession, that I am not worthy, something must take my place, there is death involved here. This is why, if you look back at the text, Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat.

The firstborn. Now people say, well, see, that's the problem, Abel brought the firstborn and Cain did not. What's the firstborn of a field of wheat? You have first fruits, the first ones that come, and you can get a little sample of that, and this isn't a first fruits, it could have said the first fruits of the grain, but it's pretty hard to say firstborn, they kind of all come up at once.

It's a parallel versus serial idea. And that is, it is an important detail that Abel not only brings an animal, but it is the firstlings of his flock, and it is the best of his flock. The fat means not so much that he got some fat out of the animal and put it in separately, as when you talk about the fat of the land, these are the very best in his flock.

They are the first and they are the best. And human wisdom says, well, those are the ones I'm going to use for breeders. I'm going to build my flock and I'll have a wonderful herd because I've taken the very best calves and I breed them.

This is evolution, this is Darwinism, you take the survival of the fittest. And in God's economy, it's just the reverse. The very best and the very fit and the first ones that you would think, well, I'm going to get the magic of compounding going here with these first ones.

He takes those and kills them before the Lord. Over the process of time, attitudes have developed. Cain, in my view, and people throw vegetables at me for this, they don't throw animal parts, they throw vegetables.

Cain is a believer. He is coming, it isn't that he doesn't believe in God, he absolutely believes in God. It says he brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.

Why would he bring an offering to somebody he didn't believe in or didn't care about? Why would he make an offering at all? He is communicating and representing himself before a God. So what's the problem? It isn't that, well, he didn't slay an animal and he's not saved. He's saved, but he presumes a relationship that does not exist because over the process of time, he has not cultivated a relationship with God at all.

He believes in God, he acknowledges God, and when it's time for sacrifice, he'll bring a sacrifice, but over the process of time, he has become very satisfied with himself and he's going to approach God at sort of a table of equals and bring the grain and say, well, hello there, Lord, I'm sure you're glad to see me. It's kind of like, if you imagine in the abstract two strangers meeting and one of them just runs up and hugs and cries on the shoulder of this other total stranger. What is the huggee going to think? I don't know you, to use the context, from Adam's off ox.

You know, you're hugging, you're crying, you're acting like I'm your long lost. Who are you? A total stranger hugging another stranger would presume a relationship that did not exist. Now, same situation, but these people have discovered via email that they were siblings separated and adopted in their young childhood, haven't seen each other in 30 or 40 years.

One of them comes to the airport or the other, two total strangers, one of them runs up and hugs the other one and cries. Now what's the situation? Same action, but entirely different level of communication and appreciation and representation. Why? Relationship.

There is a basis, there is an understanding. This is why I am coming to you with this expression of appreciation and understanding and good, you know, hail fellow well met. Cain brings a sacrifice that is false.

He doesn't have a basis of a relationship with God. He hasn't come in humility. There's no record that he ever brought the animal sacrifice, which must necessarily precede this, that acknowledges in humility, it's my fault.

I am the sinner. It is your grace that has bridged this gap and allowed me a means of approach. That's why the text says, the Lord respected Abel and his offering.

It's the person first, then the sacrifice. It doesn't say the Lord respect, we often in memory, we say, well, the Lord respected Abel's sacrifice. He didn't respect Cain's sacrifice.

It's the person first. The Lord respected Abel and because he respected Abel, he respected his sacrifice. The sacrifice is representative of the person.

If the person is not qualified, if the person is not acceptable, it doesn't matter what the sacrifice is. The sacrifice itself may be legitimate, but that which it represents is not. This is why we are

so careful to emphasize the representative nature of sacrifice.

That which it represents has to be acceptable. You can't take an unacceptable thing, send a message that is a really wonderful message. I've used this example before, but if you murder your brother, what do you think would happen if Cain then sent Eve a Mother's Day card? Hi mom, love ya.

How would that be received? Nothing wrong with the card, nothing wrong with the sentiment. What's the problem? The person sending it is not on good terms with the recipient. That's the problem here.

God did not respect Cain. Now, point of application. We may do a lot of good things.

We may attend church. We may read scripture. We may pray.

We may study our Bibles. We can do a lot of things and those things in and of themselves are great. But you cannot justify yourself on the basis of what you present, on the basis of what you do.

Cain gets angry because his very presentable sacrifice doesn't overcome his lack of personal acceptability. It isn't the sacrifice, it's Cain. He's the problem.

And God does not respect Cain. Because he doesn't respect Cain, Cain could have brought a flock of lambs and it still would have not been acceptable. As one of our chiasmic symmetries that you find, this is one of the very first chapters in the Bible.

What's in the very last chapters of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, Malachi? What does God talk about? You keep bringing me sacrifices and they're a stench in my nostril. Why? Well, they're corrupting and polluting the altar, not only because they're bringing weak and lame sacrifices, but even if the sacrifices were good, they themselves are not in a position to offer them. This is why in another place God will say, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

Truth in the inward parts is what God is looking for. That has to be fixed first. We have to be careful not to make the mistake of Cain, which is pointed out two places in the New Testament.

You remember both Jude and Paul point out that Cain, the error of Cain, the way of Cain is to think that you can put something between yourself and God that will make you acceptable. You have to be acceptable before you send anything God's way. And that is a matter of the heart.

The offeror has to be qualified. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back we're going to move forward to one of the next very prominent episodes of sacrifice in the Word of God and this is going to be about 14 chapters forward in Genesis.

Let's pause here and take our break.