

Christ in the Sacrifices 16-01-17b

I found what I was looking for in the first service. I wanted to give attribution to this idea because I thought it was nicely expressed. There is an article that was written by a man named William K. Gilders, G-I-L-D-E-R-S, called Sacrifice in Ancient Israel.

And I ran across this in some Society for Biblical Literature materials, the SBL, if you will. And let me just quickly recap this, because I do think it's important, it is central, in fact, to our understanding of Christ in the sacrifices. This is one of the big, main ideas.

Six months from now, a year from now, two years from now, sometime in the distant future if we're all still here, or any part of us are still here, and you think back on, well, you know, we did that Christ in the sacrifices. And I remember we looked at Cain and Abel, and we looked at Noah, we looked at Abraham, we looked at these different ones, and before we're finished, we'll look at a couple of sacrifices after this time in that strange interlude of the judges. I've been working on a couple of those out of the book of Judges, and it's really quite interesting to see what was and wasn't observed after these instructions were given on Sinai and before the temple was constructed.

Anyway, Sacrifice in Ancient Israel, William K. Gilders, Society of Biblical Literature. This is in a series on teaching the Bible, some materials that were prepared for public school teachers by the SPL. But he says, and this is his introductory paragraph, and you can see whether or not I accurately represented him.

In our world, people commonly understand sacrifice to involve some kind of loss, usually for the sake of a greater good. A person may be said to sacrifice time, pleasure, or happiness. The death of a soldier in war is often referred to as a sacrifice.

Sacrifice in this understanding involves giving up something. However, in the case of the ancient Israelite practices we commonly refer to as sacrifices, it is better to think of giving over rather than giving up. He goes on to trace the etymology of the English word sacrifice from Latin and so on.

In the Hebrew Bible, the primary Hebrew term for sacrifice is korban, something brought forward, an offering, which indicates the basic ancient Israelite understanding of this activity. In the Hebrew Bible, Israel's God, Yahweh, is always the recipient of legitimate Israelite sacrifice. One of the most helpful ways to think about sacrifice is as gifts given over to God.

We can understand this type of gift giving by thinking about gift giving in our own lives, especially that of young children to parents. Parents really don't need the gifts their children give them. Sometimes a tie given to a father, a bottle of perfume for a mother.

Often enough, the money a young child uses to purchase a gift comes from the parents themselves. However, the giving and receiving of such gifts is important. Notice giving and

receiving of those gifts.

Because it expresses a relationship of commitment, care, and love. When they performed sacrifices, ancient Israelites gave over to God some of what they believed God had given them, expressing their close relationship with God and seeking to deepen that bond. I think that's very well expressed.

In some passages, the sacrificial offerings are called food. We saw this in Leviticus 3.11. Remember Leviticus 3, the peace offering, the Shalem type offering? You find this also in Leviticus 21.6 and 22.25. Referring to a sacrificial offering as food makes sense in a culture in which the sharing of meals is an important means and marker of trust, intimacy, and connectedness. Sharing food with God, even though God doesn't need food, marks and sustains the relationship.

In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice always involves transformation. One of the most common ways to transform something as a sacrifice is to destroy it. Destruction removes the animal from the ordinary realm to a transcendent one.

Biblical text tells us what God has received from His sacrifice was the smoke of the burning as a pleasing aroma. By receiving the smoke, the transformed sacrifice, God enjoyed a fellowship meal with human beings. This meal took place at God's house, God's dwelling, the temple.

The temple where sacrifice was offered was a domestic setting, the place of God's presence with the nation. One of the most common terms for the temple was house. Another Hebrew term means palace.

The structure had domestic furnishings such as a lamp and a table. The altar was essentially a cooking surface, a barbecue so to speak, where the sacrificial animal was, quote, cooked. Burning up or overcooking the sacrifices in the altar fire marked out the specialness of these food offerings.

In ancient Israelite sacrifice, death is not the primary focus. The killing of the animals is a means to an end. Killing the animal makes its flesh and blood available for special use.

In our own society, those who have hunted or who have raised livestock for meat are probably in the best position to understand this point. Killing an animal is simply how it is made available for food. References to this practice are scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible beginning in the book of Genesis.

The first sacrificial offerings brought by Cain and Abel, Genesis 4, we looked at that. The theme is clear. Human beings can relate to God through offering over the products of their labor.

The theme of God's positive response to sacrifice is strongly present in the account of Noah's sacrifice after the great flood in Genesis chapter 8. There, God smells the pleasing aroma of burnt sacrifices and determines to never again bring destruction on the world. Then he goes on

to review the sacrifices that we've already looked at in Leviticus 1 through 6, burnt offering, the olah in Leviticus 1, and of course the priestly instructions in 6 that we've already looked at. The defining feature of this sacrifice was the whole animal or bird was burned in the altar fire.

It was, therefore, the most extravagant sacrifice. Grain offering, handful is burned and the rest goes to the priests. Chapter 3, the fellowship offering, the zeva shalomim or the shalom offering, peace offering.

Herd or flock animal offered. The inwards were burned in the altar fire. Most of the animal was eaten and divided between the priests and the offeror.

This sacrifice was associated with feasting. As the name suggests, strongly positive character. Four, the sin offering, purification offering, the chatat, dealt with disruption of relationship between human beings and God.

And, of course, the variations depend on your status, what is your function, how deeply do you affect the congregation when you commit this sin. And then the guilt offering, the asham, which literally means responsibility. This dealt with distinct categories of wrongdoing, disrupting relationship, unintentional desecration of sacred things and so on.

Prescribed sacrifice was a flock animal. As with the peace offering and the sin offering, the inward parts were burned in the altar fire. The animal's flesh is eaten by the priests.

Major is obviously enjoying this lesson very much as he lies on his back staring at me and feet to the sky doing the dying cockroach there. But Mr. Gilder goes on to say, also significant is the fact that every animal sacrifice includes some special treatment of the animal's blood. The animal's blood.

Various biblical passages, identity with the life force of the animal. Despite the clear importance of this ritual use of blood, its importance is detailed in the passage we looked at in the first session, Leviticus 17.11. The life of the flesh is in the blood. Interpreters have debated the meaning of this verse.

It may in fact represent the distinct viewpoint of just one particular group of Jerusalem priests. Mr. Gilder is respecting the fact that you've got your J, your E, your P, and your D, and you've got your priestly guys saying one thing and your Deuteronomist saying another. God bless him.

He can talk to the Lord about that later. A final point is the crucial role assigned to the priest in the sacrificial instructions in Leviticus. Sacrifice is not a do-it-yourself activity.

You remember in the context of Leviticus 17, anybody that is going to slay a sacrificial animal needs to come to the house of God and let the priests superintend the offering. It is no longer done. From the point of Sinai forward, you are no longer doing it as a family priest on your own behalf and behest, and that becomes interesting when we look at some of the examples in Judges.

But specially designated and set apart mediators are required to bring about the transfer and transformation of the offering. It is done at God's house, mediated by, superintended by, participated in by the priests. These agents are not only expert in proper procedures, they also bear the risk of moving into God's special presence.

From those to whom much is given, much is required, and priests ran a much greater risk of falling into judgment because they had so much more in terms of requirement for sanctification and avoiding being defiled and so on. So, sacrifice, he concludes here, was mainstream religion in the ancient world. It may be difficult for modern people to understand the religious significance of killing and cutting up animals and burning them in an altar fire.

However, we can bridge this cultural gap if we understand that sacrifice was fundamentally about transforming and sharing of food to express, build, and reinforce the relationship between God and human beings. I think he is exactly on the mark, and I think that's a very nice, succinct summary of that principle. It isn't about the slaughter and death.

It is about the fellowship and relationship with God and understanding that nothing that is brought before God and committed to Him and even sent to Him in death is ever truly lost. It is in God's hands. And a part of our faith in the invisible is recognizing that in God's economy, as the old Jake Hess song goes, death ain't no big deal.

God gives life, God can give life again. And the basis for so doing in creation in general and in the human race in particular is the perfect sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross. On that basis, all creation is liberated from death, and all humanity is potentially liberated from death.

This is the essence of what the sacrificial system was to communicate. Trust God. Job got this even before Leviticus, didn't he? I know my Redeemer lives.

Job understood all about sacrifice. I know that I will stand one day. Right? The dog is snoring.

Can you remove him to his snoring place? He's here in front of me. Oh, okay. Well, it's amazingly, distractingly loud.

I mean, snoring has traditionally been a part of Sunday morning services, but usually it's the humans, not the animals. Well, I can hear it. No pastor wants to hear snoring while he's holding forth.

It's just the principle of the thing. But it does, in a way, illustrate how much we have in common with the animals. You know, dreaming, snoring, sleeping through church, that's all kind of one thing.

Well, back to Leviticus, because we are fast approaching the conclusion of this study, having surveyed. And the thing to remember is, as you think about Leviticus, just remember the code. When there is a bullock involved, an ox, a member of the male bovine species here, what does that remind us of? This is power under subordination.

It is strength subordinated. And it pictures the Lord Jesus. At any point, he could have called 10,000 angels, as the song says, to destroy the world and set him free.

He told his disciples, Do you not know that I could call 12 legions of angels anytime I want to? He had that power, but he subordinated his strength and his power and even his authority to the will of God the Father. That's what the bull represents. Remember the ram or the he-goat? And by the way, these are not cryptic, I need the cipher for the day to understand type of things.

These are things that a common Israelite could observe and understand. So it's not hidden, and it's not deep, and it isn't something that you've got to be initiated into the 34th level of the Masons or something to understand. Anybody who took the time to reflect and who sought God's meaning in these sacrifices could figure this out.

So as we look at it, it ought to be fairly easy to remember. And especially for these people who observe these animals all the time. It's more distant for city dwellers like us who don't see them anymore and don't care for them.

But a bullock, everybody understood. They were the tractor of the ancient world, right? What about a ram or a he-goat? What did people immediately associate with them? Fruitfulness, where there is a ram among the goats, you're going to have a lot more goats. Willfulness, the butting of heads that the rams would do with their horns.

The sure-footedness of a ram. David reflects on this. You've set my feet in high places.

Sure-footedness where others don't dare to go. You've got special capabilities in terms of stability in difficult places. And when you think about the Lord Jesus and His steadiness under pressure, when you think of His aggressive pursuit of the will of the Father, His singleness of purpose, all of these things are reflected and given to us in memory form.

You think of it and you remember it when you look at the ram or the he-goat. Also the sheep and even the lambs, especially the lambs. But the sheep in general.

What do you think of when you think of sheep? You think of Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. One thing about sheep is sheep without a shepherd is a bad thing, right? Sheep are dependent. They need protection.

They need leadership. And they follow the voice of the shepherd. So this, once again, is more of a focus on submission, on dependence, a need for protection.

It's the metal part, Andrew. You can't touch the wood and get it to do anything. So that's the idea of the sheep.

This ought to be something you can remember, right? What about the birds? What about birds? What's memorable about them? The sacrifice of a bird. We think of deity because this is

something that is associated with the heavens. And the bird is invisibly supported.

It is supported by something you can't see. Animals walk on the ground. You see their support under their feet.

A bird is invisibly lifted. And so this is association with divine things. You look at poor people.

The poor are the ones that brought the bird sacrifice. Well, their support and their provision is not visible, is it? It's not wealth. It's not riches.

It's not business assets. And yet God looks after them and God cares for them. But their support is of an invisible nature.

And they most closely reflect the connection that is necessary between we who are hopeless and helpless and useless apart from God. So these are easy things. What about the distribution of the parts and the application of the blood? It's pretty straightforward.

The average Israelite with a little bit of reflection could figure this out, couldn't they? If you're putting the blood around the base of the altar, this is the life of the flesh, the giving over of this animal's life directly to God in this place of God's presence. The altar is before the door of the tabernacle. What if you're taking it in further? This means that it's not enough, the place of individual sacrifice.

What you have done, what you are atoning for and what you are recognizing is the effect of your failure or the effect of your actions, particularly in the sin and trespass offerings, on everybody else. You haven't just disrupted your relationship with God. You have affected those around you.

And so everybody's relationship with God has been affected. When Achan took the forbidden things and hid them in his tent, he took clothing, he took a couple of bars of gold and so on and hid them in his tent with his family's collusion. The entire nation suffered.

People died because of Achan's sin. And that requires taking the blood further. You've got to go to the very presence of God.

You've got to go inside if it's a priest. You've got to go inside if it's something that potentially causes this level of harm to others. Application of the blood.

Where does it go? The different parts are pretty easily parsed. If you're taking the innards, this is the, you know, God desires truth in the inward parts. It is that inward part reflecting the truth of God that has been absorbed and has been, like they say, metabolized.

It's been made a part of our thinking. This is what goes to God on the altar in several of these sacrifices. The skin goes to the priest.

This is the proof of the perfection. This is a proof that this offering was worthy. Present

yourselves holy and acceptable to God.

Don't try to commit yourself to God when you haven't purged out known sin. If you have a pattern and a habit of known sin, trying to come before God and offer yourself as an olah isn't going to work. You've got something you've got to do first.

You've got to become that without blemish offering. Do that first. Cleanse the outward part, practice and habit and what is observable and cleanse the inward parts.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. The outside and the inside.

The Word of God is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The things that are done in secret, that are said in secret, that are thought in secret, the Lord says one day will be shouted from the housetops. So let's make sure that stuff is acceptable.

So these elements of sacrifice are meaningful. Every detail. Things that are taken outside the camp.

The disposition of the ashes. The placing of the fat. The best and most fruitful part.

The part that indicates prosperity. The part that is choice and reserved for God goes on top. The frankincense that was sprinkled.

We've looked at all of these things. That was on the meal offering. The grain representing that effort that we put in where we take what God gives us from the ground and we work with it.

And we refine it. And we grind it. And we cook it.

And we mix it with oil. Oil representing the Holy Spirit. These things are not difficult.

They're not cryptic. So as we think about that now, we don't bring these sacrifices anymore. These literal grain offerings and animal offerings.

What is our sacrifice? The principle is the same. If it is a giving over and a recognition of the invisible side of life. This is something that always really surprises me.

Especially the recent trend in the postmodern world of materialism. The materialist constantly emphasizes our physical origins. Our physical experiences.

Every question we have can be solved by physical approaches. Using physical equipment with physics and with chemistry and with observation through astronomy and the rest of it. And it dumbs down everything to the physical.

And yet we are all aware that there are things that cannot be measured or appreciated or understood in the physical realm. Ethics, morality, aesthetics, beauty. Beauty in music.

Beauty in art. Beauty in a sunset. These are not things that science has access to.

And yet they are things that all human beings are aware of and have an appreciation of. And have a sensitivity to. It is what distinguishes us from the animals.

You can take your dog up on a hillside before the most gorgeous scenic sunset that ever was. Rolling fields. Beautiful clouds.

Infinite variation of tints and colors in the sky. A thing that would just send you into raptures and inspire you to write poetry or create music. Looking at that scene, your dog is listening and smelling for prey.

That's what he's doing. The whole beauty of the sunset is utterly lost on him. If he sniffs or hears something in the brush.

Sunset? What's that to me? In the physical world, there's some small creature I can chase and potentially consume. That's the dumbing down of everything to the material. To say, well, there are blind people and therefore there's no such thing as sight.

Well, people that have eyes know there is such a thing as sight. And the fact that someone is blind from birth and we have to convince them, no, there is another sense that you don't have access to. Well, they could disbelieve us and say, well, I just don't believe that.

I've never seen anything. And you claim that you have this access via some, you know, you don't touch it. You don't hear it.

You don't walk on it. And yet you say it's there and you can sense it at a distance. I know nothing of that.

My world is auditory. My world is touch-based, sense-based. And this idea that something can be a mile away and you can talk about it and claim that it has color.

I don't believe you. Well, how would you convince the blind person that you actually can? You know, your personal experience they might find unconvincing. Well, the same thing is true in the spiritual realm.

The difference being that in the spiritual realm, human beings who reduce themselves to the merely material aren't blind. They have shut their eyes and refused to open them. And seeing, you can see and not perceive.

Hearing, you can hear and not understand. But everyone has to recognize that there is an invisible level in which we all have eyes and we all have ears. We have a sensitivity to the aesthetic and the ethic and the moral.

All cultures have modesty sensitivity. In the history of the world, there has never been people who were happily naked. They claim that they have found this and the other aborigine.

Every culture has modesty rules. It's a minimum of a loincloth. All of them.

Maybe they suspend it for children or whatever, but for adults? Where does that sensitivity come from? It is the common moral ethical sense that is conscience. It's built into all of us. All of us have a God-given sensitivity to higher things.

Every culture seems to have some level of art. Whether it is creating things from sticks and stones, scratching it into rock, painting it on cave walls, or higher and higher expressions. Weaving things.

They don't just weave a basket. They weave a decorative basket. They put a decorative stripe.

When they create something out of clay, they will decorate it. There is an artistic sense that is common to man. It isn't functional.

It has no evolutionary benefit. Descent with modification doesn't confer advantage for art, or for music, or for laughing. Have you ever seen a dog laugh? Or any other animal laugh? Not counting the hyenas.

In the sense of finding humor in things, humor is uniquely human. And it confers no evolutionary advantage. It isn't of a material nature.

These are a part of our aesthetic sense. And to deny that it exists is just in the service of a philosophical dedication that doesn't partake of reality. Well, this is the sense that the sacrifices appeal to.

The sacrificial system from beginning to end, up to and including, and culminating, and consummated in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, is an appeal to rise above the material and the literal. The life of the flesh is in the blood, is an appeal to understand at a spiritual level, at an immaterial level, at an ethical, and in the realm of ideas. So many people have lost, even the great classical philosophers.

You go back to Plato. Plato, before the Lord Jesus Christ ever came to this earth, distinguished for the Greeks the difference between a physical chair, on which you may be sitting right now, and the idea of a chair. And his illustration was, look, I can take the chair you're sitting on, and I can smash it to flinders, and I can burn it, and destroy it, and it's gone.

But you can build another chair because you have the idea of a chair. There is a reality called chair, the idea of a chair, something with a seat and supports that keeps you off the ground when you don't want to stand. It is an idea that has a reality, but it's an invisible and intangible reality.

All of us recognize these invisible, intangible realities. There is beauty in music. There is beauty in art.

There is beauty in behavior. There is humor in all of those areas. There is serious occasion for

reflection in all of those areas.

Much music is reflection. Much art is reflection. Much in the spiritual life is reflection.

And these are realities. They make a difference. And yet, you can't put them on a scale, or bottle them, or weigh them, or in any other way access them with science.

Because science is material. And in the material world, God bless science. I love my technology as much as the next guy.

But I don't limit myself to that. And to look at the sacrificial system as merely animal slaughter, and how heinous, and what kind of a God would mandate that, is to miss the entire realm of significance for which every single one of us is equipped. Now, if God has given us that capability, it's for a reason.

And we are held accountable for its use. You're accountable for your thoughts. You're accountable for your motives.

Can science measure a motive? Can someone hand you five grams of motivation? Can you find a jar of selfishness on the shelf? Can you find a bottle of selflessness anywhere? Of altruism, of generosity, of charity, of love. You can say, well, there are hormones and there are chemicals. Hormones and chemicals are fine.

But where is that invisible motive force that rules people and moves people, and creates change and creates a difference? It's invisible. Well, there is accountability and responsibility in this invisible, God-given realm of capability. You are accountable.

I am accountable. That's what the sacrificial system communicates. Accountability, responsibility.

For what we decide and what we do. And to connote that, to express that, you have substitutionary atonement. What I have done is not right.

I have violated the commandment of God. You remember in chapter 4, done something against the commandments of the Lord. Because in the invisible realm, God has set standards of what is right and what is wrong.

And Jesus said, you got to remember the invisible element. It's not about the physical act of adultery. It's about the heart motivation to adultery.

If a man looks at a woman to lust after in his heart, he has already committed adultery. Because the standard is in the invisible realm. The sacrifice is meaningful in the invisible realm.

That's why you and I can offer the sacrifice of Romans 12, 1 and 2. Don't let the world push you into the conveniently irresponsible, the conveniently unaccountable material world. When the Holy Spirit comes, Jesus said, He will do what? He will heal and make the lame walk in the blind

see and the deaf hear. Things will move and fly around the room to show you that there really is a God.

What does the Holy Spirit do? By the way, is the Holy Spirit visible? Just an academic question here. Is the Holy Spirit visible? Can you weigh Him? Can you measure Him? How do you sense the Holy Spirit as a believer? It is with that same set of senses with which we access all of the aesthetic and moral and ethical world. And we're fully equipped.

We have spiritual eyes. We have spiritual ears. But all of that is dead if it isn't used in the service of God.

It is not righteous and it is not fruitful. And if it is unfruitful and if it is not righteous, meaning if it doesn't comport and pursue with the righteousness of God, then it's dead. And that's why Paul can say, you were dead in trespasses and sins.

So that invisible realm to which we have access, we can commit ourselves. We can offer ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And it isn't a matter of examining the skin.

And it isn't a matter of looking for the blemish. It is a matter of the heart. It is a matter of the thoughts and the motivations with which we come before God or choose not to come to God.

But we will all stand before the judgment. It will either be the great white throne judgment for those that have thrown over all reference to the Lord Jesus Christ altogether. Or it will be the judgment seat of Christ for those who name the name of Christ and are in Christ.

You and I being in Christ, Paul says, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for what we do. This is the meaning and purpose of the sacrificial system. It is to tell us what kind of fire there is going to be at the judgment.

It will either be a wonderful sacrificial fire that sends a pleasing aroma to God. Or it will be the wood, hay and stubble bonfire. We can offer that holy and acceptable sacrifice to God now, fully committing ourselves in an olah.

And there will be no need for fire later. What did John the Baptist say about the coming Lord Jesus? What is He going to baptize you with? The Holy Spirit and with fire. The Holy Spirit is invisible.

The fire takes what is visible and turns it invisible. In either case, we are going to be baptized with something. And we choose day by day by day which it is.

That is really what it is to remember about Christ in the sacrifices. Our study in Leviticus is pretty much concluded. We are going to look at the post-Levitical sacrifices very quickly in another week or two.

And then we will be finished. And we will be moving on to our next study which is going to be

hard questions of the Bible. And if you have a hard question of the Bible that you have been scratching your head over, let me know.

Send it to me either anonymously or anonymously. As you see fit. And I will put it on the list of things that we study in the days ahead.

But this study is definitional for you and for me. Who are we? Why are we here? It is the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ that defines us. And we will ultimately be judged by that standard.

Do you want to be cut off from the people? Do you want to be in the darkness which is outside? Or do you want to be qualified to be in the camp? In the New Jerusalem. Holy and acceptable. Fitted for service.

Reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus. You do not lose your salvation. But we can certainly lose blessing and opportunity and potential in the eternal future.

And why would we want to do that? The eternal future is a long time. And as Shakespeare says, this particular life is just a brief candle. So let's take advantage of the great opportunity the Lord Jesus gave us.

In his death and in his life on our behalf. We will close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the way that you have made for us to enter into your presence through the veil. Where formerly we were separated from you by our trespasses and our sins. We have been cleansed.

We've been sanctified. We've been given the opportunity to not just approach but to be treated as your children. To have those privileges and those opportunities and those blessings that attach to having you as our Heavenly Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ as our guarantee of acceptability in your sight. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.