

## **No Sacrifice, No Sacrament**

Matthew 26:17-30

Holy Thursday, April 13, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

In the Book of Leviticus God commands the priests to eat the sin offering.

God commanded Israel that if one of them committed a sin unintentionally, they could atone for that sin by offering a sin offering. The status of the person offering the sin offering determined what sort of animal they offered. For example a priest who had sinned unintentionally offered a bull to atone for his sin. A leader of Israel, like a judge, offered a ram for his sin. The average Israelite offered a goat for his sin.

Whoever had committed the sin would bring the animal to the Tent of Meeting. The person making the offering would slaughter the animal at the Tent of Meeting. The priest would then take some of the blood of the animal and put it on the horns of the altar which stood in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. Furthermore the priest would remove the fat of the animal and burn it on the altar as a soothing aroma to the Lord.

Once this sacrifice was completed the person making the offering would be forgiven. God would forgive that person according to His promise which He had attached to the sacrifice. Furthermore once the sacrifice was completed God commanded the priest to eat the rest of the animal.

Needless to say the priest could not eat the sin offering unless the sin offering was sacrificed. There was no eating unless there was a death.

Jesus fulfills the sin offering.

To put it another way, the sin offerings that the people of Israel made were foreshadowings of the offering that Jesus would make. There were certain things about the sin offerings of Israel that Jesus would do only better. For example the sin offering had to be without blemish. It had to be a perfect physical specimen. If it were not, God would not accept it for atonement for the person's sins. Jesus is a perfect person all of the way around. Not only was He physically perfect, He was also spiritually perfect. There was no sin or blemish in Him. The sin offering had to shed its blood in order to effect atonement. In the same way Jesus had to shed His blood in order to affect atonement. The animal therefore was dying in place of the person offering the animal. Since the person offering the animal had sinned, even though the sin was unintentional, it would still cost the worshipper his life unless the sin was atoned. Therefore God commanded the sacrifice for the purpose of atoning such sins. But since such sins deserved death as all sins do and the animal was dying to procure atonement for the worshipper, the animal was therefore dying in place of the worshipper. Therefore Jesus was dying in place of others when He offered His life to make atonement.

Jesus is also superior by far to the animals offered in the Old Testament. Jesus is a human being. He is the image of God. The animals were not. Jesus is not just any human being. He is a perfect human being. He is without sin. Jesus is not just any perfect human being, He is the divine human being. He is God in the flesh. Jesus does not offer just any sacrifice. He offers a willing sacrifice. Unlike the animals who do not know what is happening to them when the worshipper takes them to the Tent of Meeting, Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to Him when He makes His sacrifice.

Jesus does not atone for one human being or even one group of human beings, but for all human beings. He atones for the whole of the creation.

Since Jesus knows what is going to happen, He makes His prophecy on the night when He was betrayed. He looks at the Twelve and tells them that one of them will betray Him.

When His betrayal is carried out Jesus will be put on trial. The trial will be illegal and the witnesses will be false, but He will still be found guilty and turned over to the Gentiles. The enemies of Jesus will put political pressure on Pilate and Pilate will have Jesus executed by crucifixion. Jesus will die. His betrayal sets all of this in motion and insures His death. That is why the Son of Man will go as it is written about Him, but woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. Would that such a man had not been born.

And ever after "On the night when our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed..." is part of the Words of our Lord with which the bread and the wine are consecrated for sacramental use.

You see there is one other way that Jesus is similar to the sin offering of the Old Testament. The priests of God eat Him. If the priests of God ate the sin offering in Leviticus at God's command, then it makes sense that the priests of the New Testament eat the sin offering at God's command. And just as the sin offering of the Old Testament made the priests who ate it holy so also the sin offering of the New Testament hallows those priests who eat of it now. It forgives them of their sins.

And so there are no symbols here. There cannot be symbols if the priests of God are going to eat the sacrifice that takes away sins as they have been commanded. If the Sacrament of the Altar is merely symbolic then Leviticus has no relevance and you can say that the Bible is inspired all you like. Inspiration of Holy Scripture can only be maintained as long as you maintain that you are really eating Christ's body in the Sacrament of the Altar.

What I mean to say is this: there are some Christians who deny that Jesus is truly present in the Sacrament of the Altar. They say that the bread and the wine are not the body and the blood of Jesus. They say that the bread only represents the body and the wine only represents the blood of Jesus. They deny the power of Jesus to put His body and blood there. They say that it defies the nature of bodies and blood to be present in more than one place at a time. They do not fully grasp that they are dealing with God when they deal with Jesus. They do not acknowledge that Leviticus tells the priests to eat the sin offering. If Jesus is the sin offering, He must be eaten. When He is eaten He hallows those people who are eating. Therefore regardless of what anyone says about it, it is His body and His blood. And you really eat and drink it. In a supernatural way, to be sure, but who ever said that a supernatural event was by definition an unreal one? The point of being an event is that it happened.

This also means that when you come up here and eat and drink, you are priests. Priests eat the sin offering. You eat the sin offering as your Lord has commanded you to do. Therefore when you come up here it is an indication that you are His priests. You are performing your priestly duty when you come up here. Your priestly duty is dependent on His priestly duty. He offered the sacrifice and you eat it.

The Sacrament of the Altar cannot work unless Jesus is dead.

The priests in the Old Testament under the Levitical code could not eat the sin offering unless it had died. Only after the sin offering had died could the priests eat it.

Likewise the priests of God in the New Testament cannot eat the sin offering unless it is sacrificed. The sin offering cannot take away sin unless He is sacrificed. And so Jesus offers His own life. He is not like an animal that does so without knowledge. He fully understands what He is doing. He offers His own life. He bleeds the blood that purifies us from our sins. He purifies us from the sins of inadvertence and the sins that we have deliberately committed. He purifies them all.

Once atonement is provided, He is eaten. His priests eat Him. You are His priests because you eat Him. As His priests you stand in between Him and the world performing your priestly duties. You pray on behalf of the world because the Father of Jesus will not listen to anyone else. You proclaim what Jesus has done. You proclaim His death. The chief way that you proclaim His death is by eating His body and drinking His blood.

The Sacrament of the Altar cannot work unless Jesus rose from the dead.

This has to do with time. When the people of the Old Testament slaughtered their animals, the priests of the Old Testament immediately ate the sacrifice before the meat went bad. Since such sin offerings in the Old Testament purified people only temporarily from their sins, they had to be repeated. Over and over again they were repeated. But Jesus performs one sacrifice that purifies the entire universe for all time. No other sacrifice is needed. Therefore a means must be found for getting the priests of God to comply with the Levitical instructions to eat the sin offering. This means would be impossible if Jesus died and stayed dead. His body would be lying in a grave somewhere in Palestine if that were true and it would be quite impossible for you to eat it.

Therefore Jesus rose from the dead. A risen Jesus mantled with divine power can give you His body to eat and He does so throughout time until His visible return. His resurrection and His sacrament are supernatural such that you eat of Him and He does not die again. Death no longer has mastery over Him. You eat Him and the person next to you eats Him and He does not die. You eat Him and you eat Him again next week and He still does not die. He is constantly giving you this gift of Himself and it hallows you. It makes you holy. It forgives you of your sins.

Then Jesus goes a step further. He gives you His blood to drink.

In the Old Testament the priests and all the people of God were forbidden to drink the blood of the sacrifices. The only reason that God gave was that the blood was the life of the animal. He gave no more explanation than that.

Jesus by contrast commands us to drink His blood. The ban on drinking the blood of the sin offering is lifted. He grants us His blood to drink. Initially that might seem like a big change except that the reason that God forbade it in the Old Testament is precisely the reason why He commands it in the New Testament. In other words God forbade the people from drinking the blood of animals in the Old Testament because the blood was the life of the animal. He commands you to drink His blood in the New Testament because His blood is His life and He wants you to have it.

So come forward, dear priests of God. Come forward. Eat and drink. Come forward and take what your Lord has spent His life preparing for you. He has made it all possible by His death and resurrection. It is all here for you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.