

Priest

Leviticus 16

Last week we saw three requirements for atonement to be made:

How Atonement can be Made:

1. Sin must be acknowledged
2. A price must be paid
3. A mediator must intercede

Sorry is not enough, but it is the necessary first step. There must be a payment - some kind of sacrifice, which we will get into in more depth today. And we focused last week on **the mediator we need** - one who is perfectly holy and righteous - which is exactly what we have in Christ. Moses was a good mediator, but he was not perfect. ***We have a better Moses in Christ*** who lives to intercede for us!

Today we come to Leviticus 16 - **The Day of Atonement**. Here was the center of the Jewish calendar year.

The Jewish Year:

1st Month Passover	3rd Month Pentecost	7th Month Atonement
Salvation	Blessing	Forgiveness

The year started with ***Passover*** and the feast of Unleavened Bread. ***Pentecost*** followed 50 days later with a presentation of the first fruits of their harvest, represented by two loaves of bread. Then in the middle of their year, the high point, was the single ***Day of Atonement***. Passover represented their salvation - their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Pentecost represented provision - how the Lord blessed them with bread and life and everything else. And the Day of Atonement reminded them every year of their desperate need for forgiveness - how much they depended on the mercy of God.

Leviticus 16 is the key chapter in the Bible explaining how the Day of Atonement would work. And you see right away that it's all about how we approach God.

“The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died.” Leviticus 16:1

Verse one shows us ***what not to do***, referring back to Leviticus 10 when **Nadab and Abihu** entered the Holy Place and were immediately struck dead. They tried to approach God but did

not follow the rules. The stakes are high in this - so as we dare to draw near to God let's consider what to do and also what NOT to do.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother **not to come at any time** into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. But **in this way Aaron shall come** into the Holy Place..."
Leviticus 16:2-3

The instructions are very clear. There is a right way and a wrong way to approach God. Get this wrong - you die. Get it right, you live. These were laws for the PRIESTS - but this applies directly to each of us, for we will all stand before God one day. Get it wrong and you will die for ETERNITY. Get it right, and you will live forever and ever in the joy of direct relationship with God.

Jesus said:

On that day **many will say to me**, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Matthew 7:22-23

MANY. We must not try to neutralize warnings like this with false promises and empty assurances. There is a right way to approach our holy God and there is a wrong way. **The wrong way means you end up in hell** where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth - everlasting suffering and regret as the punishment for your lifetime of sin crushes you in unending agony. **The right way means you end up in heaven**, joyfully celebrating the glory of God in the eternity of rest and blessing He has in store for His people.

You can see the balance of the message today:

How Not to Approach God	How to Approach God
1. Alone (10:1-3)	1. Represented (16:1-6,32-33)
2. Unprepared (10:8-9)	2. Covered (16:7-22,34)
3. Apathetic (10:10-11)	3. Devoted (16:23-31)

First we will look at the example of Aaron's two sons in chapter 10 and what they did wrong that cost them their lives. Then we'll see the counterpoints in chapter 16. You can **either approach God alone** - on your own - or represented by a holy high priest. You can **come unprepared** - carrying your sin with you - or you can come with your sins forgiven and your soul covered by

the blood of a sufficient sacrifice. You can come before the Lord **apathetic** (which means you might not come very often) - or you can come in full devotion.

First - what not to do.

How Not to Approach God - (1) Alone

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered **unauthorized fire** before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.” Lev. 10:1-2

Aaron was the High Priest. He was the one appointed by God to come into the Holy Place where God’s presence dwelt. Even Aaron could only come on the appointed day and following specific procedures, which we’ll see in chapter 16. But ONLY Aaron was allowed to come. Only the High Priest. Only once a year.

God’s presence is not to be trifled with. Aaron’s sons learned this the hard way. 500 years later, in the time of King David, a man named Uzzah learned this same lesson.

How Not to Approach God - (1) Alone

“And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.” 2 Samuel 6:6-7

God’s presence dwelt in the most holy place, intentionally removed from the population of Israel lest many people die. Within the Holy Place God’s presence stayed over the Ark of the Covenant. So the Ark - a sacred box in which the 10 commandments were carried - represented God’s holy presence to the nation of Israel. Uzzah was struck dead because he made the false assumption that his hands were cleaner than the ground.

Back in Leviticus we see that Aaron’s sons not only came alone - without their father, the High Priest - but they came Unprepared. Really they came insufficiently prepared.

How Not to Approach God

2. Unprepared

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered **unauthorized fire** before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.” Lev. 10:1-2

They brought some coals and some incense - which would be part of the process for Aaron and the high priests to follow him. But they had not been commanded to do this, so the fire they

offered was “unauthorized.” In their presumption to come before the Lord in their own way, on their own terms, instead of having a cool spiritual experience offering fire in the holy place, **they were consumed by the fire of the Lord** in the holy place. Poof.

There were specific ways to prepare to enter the holy presence of God. Nadab and Abihu took two of the steps with fire and incense, but they left out a dozen other steps. They were **not sufficiently prepared**. And the main step they neglected was to bring **a sacrifice**. The central preparation for the High Priest before entering the Holy Place was to offer a bull to make atonement for his own sin and the sin of his family.

How Not to Approach God

2. Unprepared

And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die... You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.” Leviticus 10:9-10

God was teaching His people about **His holiness**. You can’t just casually stroll into the presence of God. That is a dangerous presumption.

And yet, isn’t that exactly what so many of us do today? ***We are so casual*** when it comes to worship - we barely even think about what we’re doing. Consider:

- ***What is WORSHIP?*** What are we doing when we gather to sing to the Lord and open His Word together? Do you look at Sunday as you do any other hour in your week? Is it on the level with watching your favorite show on TV or with your kids’ activities or with your next meeting at work? Probably you prepare quite a bit for that meeting at work. Probably you help your kids prepare for their sports or music lessons. Probably you work your schedule to be sure you don’t miss your favorite show or the big game... ***Do we treat worship LESS THAN our other priorities?***
- Do we realize that when we gather together **we ARE the temple of the LORD?** That He is HERE in our midst in a special way? That the Lord Himself inhabits our praise? That we encounter the living God in a corporate way that we cannot as individuals?
- I’m afraid ***we have lost most of the awe and reverence*** that the church once had when it came to worship. The typical “regular attender” only shows up for church 1-2x/month.
- ***What is PRAYER?*** Are we so presumptuous in how we chat with God that we have forgotten it is the LIVING GOD - the Creator of all things - the sovereign ruler over all people - the holy God who dwells in unapproachable light - that we are communing with?
- Did you know at the typical church prayer meeting only 2-3% of the church family shows up? Did you even know that ***we have a prayer meeting every sunday morning in my office at 8:15 am?*** Have you ever thought about coming to that as part of how you prepare for Sunday worship and support our ministry here as not a thing of human effort but pleading with God for supernatural power and results?

If we really understood worship and prayer ***we would approach them much more seriously and much more joyfully***. But these things have become COMMON to us. They have lost their sacredness, their holiness. We are dangerously presumptuous, like Nadab and Abihu.

Thankfully God doesn't strike us dead for this. But I believe ***the American church is mostly dead*** because of it. We have not seen real **revival** in our country for 150 years or more. And most "Christians" really don't care. Most of us are comfortable with life as it is - we think "Life's Good." We don't see God moving in power but that's ok. We're pretty comfortable and pretty safe. Listen to verse 10 again:

How Not to Approach God

3. Apathetic

"You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses." Leviticus 10:10-11

Do we treat the things of God as HOLY? Do we treat each other as sacred, living stones in the Temple of the Holy Spirit? Do we treat CHURCH as holy, to be guarded and protected, to preserve her purity just as we seek to protect the purity of our children? Do we guard our unity in the church and watch over our relationships? Do we serve with all of our hearts?

80% of "Christians" in the church today don't serve in any way. Our numbers are a bit better, as we are blessed to be a smaller church. But we still have a large percentage that are not involved in any ministry yet. Why is that? Why are people content NOT to serve? Why are we apathetic instead of fully devoted?

Our job is to teach the church family TO OBEY all that Jesus has commanded us. That's what it means to make disciples. We train you to OBEY Jesus as your LORD. His primary instructions were 1) love God with all you are, 2) love each other as humble servants and 3) love your neighbor as yourself. If we don't DEVOTE ourselves to those instructions we shouldn't kid ourselves and other people by claiming to be Christian.

Nadab and Abihu tried to approach God alone, unprepared and apathetic of God's commands. ***They died for their presumption, consumed by the holy fire of God.*** Many people who consider themselves Christians are in danger of that outcome when they stand before God on judgment day. He isn't likely to strike you down with lightning today. But the blazing fire of God's righteous fury will consume people who stand before God **alone** - not represented by Jesus. His wrath will fall on those who come **unprepared**, without the covering of a blood sacrifice. God's judgment will eternally torment those who are **apathetic** toward Him and His Holy Things instead of

devoting themselves fully to Him. If you are apathetic toward Jesus NOW, He will be apathetic toward you THEN.

That is what not to do. Let's look now at how we SHOULD approach God.

How Not to Approach God	How to Approach God
1. Alone (10:1-3)	1. Represented (16:1-6,32-33)
2. Unprepared (10:8-9)	2. Covered (16:7-22,34)
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Instead of coming to God alone - on our own terms and in our own way, we must come **represented** - with a perfect High Priest interceding on our behalf. Instead of coming unprepared and exposed, we must come **covered** by the blood of a sufficient sacrifice. And instead of being apathetic to how we approach God we should be **devoted** to the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We focused on being represented by a **mediator** last week in the story with the golden calf. Moses stood before God on behalf of the people and he spoke to the people on behalf of God. Moses was a good high priest, offering sacrifices for the people to make atonement for their sin and idolatry. But Moses was not a perfect high priest so his sacrifices could only provide a temporary and partial covering. In the end Moses served to point ahead to **the need for a PERFECT high priest**.

How to Approach God:

1. Represented

“But in this way **Aaron shall come** into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body... these are the holy garments.” Leviticus 16:3-4

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were not the authorized representatives for the people - **Aaron** was. He was the High Priest. These were the instructions for **The Day of Atonement** - the most holy day of the Jewish year through which the sin of the people could be addressed. Atonement is repairing the damage done to a relationship. It is fixing something that has been broken. God specified a very specific process by which atonement could be made for the people. And it started with **a representative** - the High Priest, Aaron.

Aaron had to come with **two sacrifices for himself** and then dress in special garments. It is interesting to note that the holy linen coat and undergarments were the simple attire of a servant. Usually the High Priest would wear the most ornate robe with a radiant chest-piece

covered in twelve jewels representing the twelve tribes of Israel. But on this one day each year the High Priest would remove his fancy robes and strip down into ***the simple fabric of a humble SERVANT.***

Step one for how to approach God is with the proper representation - verse 32:

How to Approach God:

1. Represented by a Perfect Priest

“And the priest who is anointed and *consecrated* as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary... and for all the people of the assembly.” Leviticus 16:32-33

Only one person was commissioned by God to make atonement for the whole nation of 2 million people. ***This was the MOST HOLY person*** - anointed and consecrated to this special task. All of the details about the clothing and the process are intended to showcase how SACRED and set apart this person was from everyone else among the whole people of God.

This holy person would remove his ornate garments, dress like a servant, slaughter a bull, pour its blood all over the altar and then sprinkle its blood on the Ark of the Covenant. Even as holy as the High Priest was, he still had to offer sacrifices for HIMSELF because every human priest was tainted by sin - including Moses and Aaron. Listen to Hebrews 7:

Represented by a Perfect Priest

“Such a high priest - *holy, innocent, unstained*, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.. has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people... For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath... appoints a Son who has been *made perfect forever.*” Hebrews 7:26-28

That is the representative we NEED - a PERFECT Priest. Jesus is the mediator we need - the representative and intercessor. Is Jesus YOUR High Priest? ***Does He represent YOU before the Lord?*** Or do you dare to approach the holy God of heaven alone, on your own terms?

We must approach God represented by a perfect high priest. Second, we must come ***COVERED by the blood of a sacrifice.*** Aaron's sons came without their father, the High Priest, and they came without a blood sacrifice. Here are the instructions in Leviticus 16:

How to Approach God

2. Covered by a Sufficient Sacrifice

“Aaron shall offer *the bull* as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. Then he shall take *the two goats* and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” Leviticus 16:6-7

Aaron brought a bull for HIS OWN SIN to make atonement for himself and his family. Then he brought two goats. Three different things happened to these three animals so let's take them each in order.

THE BULL OF THE SIN OFFERING FOR AARON

- ***Aaron took the bull and slaughtered it himself.*** Picture that grand and powerful beast - a bull - and imagine standing over it or in front of it with a sharp blade to slit its throat. No doubt this was dangerous business and lots of ropes and other helpers were involved to keep the High Priest from being trampled.
- Much of the bull's blood was caught in a container of some kind because Aaron took that blood into the Tabernacle and sprinkled it on various things.

Covered by a Sufficient Sacrifice - Blood to Atone for Sin

“And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense, and he shall bring it *inside the veil*... that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat” Leviticus 16:13-14

The Tabernacle was divided into different sections. Only priests were allowed into the outer boundaries of the tabernacle area. And only the High Priest was allowed into the inner sanctuary. Within the inner sanctuary, called the Holy Place, was a thick, ornate curtain called THE VEIL. The High Priest only entered that Most Holy Place **once a year on this day** - The Day of Atonement. With the blood of the bull on his hands, a censer full of coals and handfuls of incense he created a cloud of smoke to conceal the Mercy Seat - the cover over the Ark of the Covenant.

That was where the presence and glory of God dwelt. ***The Shekinah glory of God*** that had appeared on Mount Sinai dwelt in that Most Holy Place - which is why only one holy person could enter there and him only once a year and even then only with great ceremony, preparation and sacrifice.

God defined the way to approach Him - the way to have a relationship with Him. God is very specific. If you are reading through Leviticus right now you might feel He is OVERLY specific and if you're like us you may be editing some of these chapters for your teenage and younger kids. If nothing else comes through from **Leviticus** it should be that ***God is very CLEAR and very SPECIFIC when it comes to HOLY things.*** And nothing is more holy than the presence of God Himself.

If you want to enter God's presence, you need ***the blood of a sufficient sacrifice.*** You need to be covered rather than exposed.

The bull provided the first layer of that covering, along with the linen robes and the washings. The priest killed the bull then carried its blood into the Most Holy Place. He was “covered” by the blood of the bull. **Jesus** provides *our blood covering*. He is the truly sufficient sacrifice. Listen to Hebrews 9:

“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. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own.” Hebrews 9:24-25

Covered by a Sufficient Sacrifice

“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 9:26

The priests had to offer sacrifices every day, every month and every year. Over and over providing a TEMPORARY and PARTIAL atonement. But Jesus came and offered Himself ONCE FOR ALL - ***one ALL sufficient sacrifice to cover all sin for all time!***

So here were the three sacrifices:

Three Sacrifices

The Bull	Slaughtered, blood sprinkled, body carried outside camp
Goat #1	Slaughtered, blood sprinkled, body carried outside camp
Goat #2	Sins laid on its head, escorted out into the wilderness

THE GOAT OF THE SIN OFFERING

The bull was offered for the sins of the priest and his family. The two goats were for the sins of the people. The bull and the first goat were slaughtered, their blood poured out around the altar and some of that blood carried into the Most Holy Place to be sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. The fat of the bull and the first goat, with their kidneys and a few other parts was burned up on the altar - but the skin, the intestines and the dung were later ***carried out of the camp and were burned up outside the camp.*** Imagine if you were that guy - the priestly Intern who had to carry that nasty skin, guts and dung out to burn them out...

Do you see the symbolism here? Listen to Hebrews 13:

Covered by a Sufficient Sacrifice - Bodies carried outside to cleanse the people

“For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin **are burned outside the camp**. So Jesus also suffered **outside the gate** in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” Hebrews 13:11-12

Jesus had to carry his cross through Jerusalem and up a hill outside of town. The Jewish people did not want to be defiled by the death of criminals, so the place of execution was outside of the city. Jesus suffered “outside the gate” to cover us with His blood - “to SANCTIFY the people through his own blood.”

Remember, the whole book of **Leviticus is about HOLINESS** - making things SACRED. The Levites were set apart from the other 11 tribes to manage the affairs of the temple. Within Levi, the family of Aaron was set apart as the line of High Priests. Within the family of Aaron one High Priest was chosen to serve - he was consecrated or “sanctified” for that job. From all the flocks and herds one bull and one goat were chosen - animals made holy as the ones set apart from all the others - unblemished and chosen.

Jesus suffered outside the camp - to MAKE US HOLY - to sanctify us. Jesus became UNCLEAN, covered in our sin and defiled by DEATH itself, so that we could become HOLY. He shed His blood on the altar of the Cross so that His blood could purify us, washing away our sin and covering us before a Holy God.

THE SCAPEGOAT

The Second Goat shows another side to the sacrifice of Jesus. The priest laid his hands on the head of this goat, the scapegoat, and confessed the sins of the people - specific sins like idolatry, selfishness, corruption, injustice, neglect of compassion, failure to care for orphans and widows, failure to welcome foreigners and travelers. Through this process of confession the sins would transfer from the people onto the head of this goat. And then ***the goat was led out into the wilderness*** - allowing the nation to physically see their sins receding into the distance.

Jesus is not just our sin offering, he is also our scapegoat. Isaiah 53 says:

Covered by a Sufficient Sacrifice - Sins Carried away from the people

“The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

“As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

Have you been covered by the blood of Jesus? Are you covered by a sufficient sacrifice? Or are you utterly unprepared? Have you placed your hands upon Jesus and confessed your sins over Him so they transfer from you to Jesus as your sacrifice of atonement? If you have, then He has carried them away from you as far as the east is from the west.

Imagine all of **your sins accumulating in a suitcase and backpacks**. Throughout your life you add sin upon sin, collecting them and carrying them along - with the weight of that guilt and shame piling up on you. The Day of Atonement is about bringing all of that baggage to the sacrificial goat - dumping it all out before Him and transferring it from your back to His body.

For anyone who comes to Jesus in faith, He takes your sin - all of it, even sins you have not yet committed - and bears it on His body. ***Like the goat of the sin offering***, Jesus gave up His life to pay for that sin on the altar of the cross. Then, ***like the scapegoat***, Jesus takes all of your sin (which has been paid for) and carries it on His body outside the camp - away from you forever.

Brother, sister, friend - you don't have to carry your sin anymore. ***Jesus stands ready to take all of your baggage from you*** - to bear it for you on the cross and to carry it away into the wilderness of His suffering, death and burial.

Here is the summary:

How to Approach God

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Represented by the Perfect Priest2. Covered by the All Sufficient Sacrifice3. Devoted with Everything Engaged	<p>"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, <i>to present your bodies as a living sacrifice</i>, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1</p>
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The only fitting response to this great salvation - this amazing grace - is to devote ourselves to the Lord 100%. ***Have you engaged every part of you in worship and service to the Lord?*** Your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole body, your whole bank account, your whole day, your whole life, your whole family, your whole EVERYTHING?

Listen to the appeal of Romans 12:1... **Present your BODIES**. This is what worship really means - it means we are so filled with gratitude and joy to be represented by the Perfect High Priest and covered by the blood of His perfect, once for all sacrifice, that we fall on our faces before Him in worship and crawl up onto the altar and willingly lay on the altar for High Priest Jesus to do to us whatever he wants.

Do you really see your life - your every minute - as a living sacrifice, fully devoted to the Lord? Do I see my life that way? Do we as a church see ourselves that way? "Your life is not your own - you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your BODY."

Are you devoted to WORSHIP? May we prepare ourselves day by day and week after week to encounter the Holy God of heaven in our worship.

Are we devoted to PRAYER? May we not neglect our great privilege of prayer - as individuals, small groups and as a church.

Are we devoted to SERVING the LORD here in the church and out where we live? Do we see our lives, our time, our energy as our own or do we see all of life as a stewardship - that everything we are and all we have belongs to the Lord and is given over to Him for His glory and His purposes?

May we present ourselves to the Lord today - and every day - as a living sacrifice. This is our spiritual act of worship.

Let's pray.