

Introduction

- Risky rescue of British hostage in Afghanistan
 - political risk of spoiling the jubilee for David Cameron as he took decision to authorise the rescue mission...
- A number of years ago there was a suicide bomb attack in the Israeli city of Haifa
 - amongst all the coverage, one point was emphasised...
 - it "came just before the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur."
 - Yom Kippur, the "Day of the Atonement", will be marked by Jews from sunset this evening
- Maybe set you wondering why it was a significant day for an attack against the Jews...?
 - today we are looking in Leviticus at the institution of the day of atonement

Guardian "Whole Picture" Advert

- Back in 1986 there was an advert on the TV:
 - show advert...
 - it was only later in the advert that the camera angle was changed and you got a sense of the whole picture...
- Perspective provided meaning
 - see only one part of the what was happening and you missed the point and purpose of the events you were seeing
- In the same way we need to understand the bigger picture to understand the heart of our Christian faith:
 - did you know that the word "crucial" literally means "pertaining to a cross"?
 - something that is crucial is as important as the Cross is to Christianity!!
- But you won't find an explanation of the meaning, the point, the purpose of the Cross if you read the places in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John where the events of the crucifixion are described
 - you need a wider perspective
 - perhaps most obviously from other parts of the New Testament, eg Romans
 - but also from the Old Testament
 - and the chapter we are looking at this morning is perhaps the single clearest exploration of the background to the Cross in the whole Old Testament!

Three questions

- This chapter is all about "the day of atonement" - and to help us work out what this is all about, we're going to ask three questions:
 - so what is atonement?
 - but why these rituals?
 - why do we need atonement?

So what is atonement?

- Every month it happens: the bills come in!
 - and we wonder whether we'll have enough to cover it all...
 - perhaps we look forward to Christmas looming with a certain sense of trepidation?
 - will income cover expenditure?
- Atonement is the covering of debt:
 - but not a financial debt - rather the debt of sin
 - it is the cleaning of the record: (v.30) "...on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins."
- This day, this ceremony, these rituals pointed to the central need for sin to be

covered!

But why these rituals?

- But why **these** rituals?
 - how could the animals take human sin away?
 - short answer - they can't!
 - *"it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4)*
 - however, these sacrifices allowed sin to be dealt with, they **"worked"** because **God chose that they should**
- Verses earlier in Hebrews 10, the writer says:
 - *"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. (Hebrews 10:1)*
 - in other words, these rituals give the shape of the real thing, but are not the real thing - in the same way that a shadow shows the shape of the real thing, but is not the thing itself
- Rather as a good children's address in church communicates the main point:
 - even while omitting much, while simplifying, while not covering the full implications...
 - so the sacrifices and rituals here prescribed by the Law point towards what Jesus did on the Cross (**shadow Cross image**)
- Saving his people, making atonement, was there in God's heart from the beginning
- And two aspects of this atonement are here seen:
 - **first**, it involves transferring sin to a substitute - **v.21**
 - here shadow is of sins placed on a goat that is led out of the camp;
 - while the reality is Christ taking our sins onto himself, bearing our uncleanness because we cannot
 - and **second** atonement can be pictured in terms of a priest entering into the holy place, beyond the curtain (**v.33**), the deeper country, the place where the reality of God breaks into time and space - that priest entering on behalf of the people, to make atonement
 - its this theme that is picked up in Hebrews 4:14, 16:
 - *"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

Why do we need atonement?

- Third question...
- Picture: **clean room**, silicon fabrication, tolerances are so fine no dirt can be allowed in; hugely complicated and expensive filters and decontamination procedures!
- God's standards of perfection, the level of cleanliness he requires is so high that none of us can reach it
 - however minute, insignificant seem our action or attitude, in the context of a holy God it is like dirt in a clean room
 - and dirt on a silicon wafer means it has to be thrown away
- God can't **"just forgive"** us
 - despite what Russian Empress Catherine the Great said: **"The good God will forgive me; that's his job!"**
 - he can't just leave sin undealt with, let it go - leaving the problem undealt with!
 - our own Queen got it right in her Christmas speech, where Empress Katerine got it wrong: **"we need saving from ourselves - from our recklessness or our greed."**

God sent into the world a unique person ... a Saviour, with the power to forgive"

- Rather, we are sinners in need of a Saviour; covered in dirt when only absolute cleanliness will do
 - so the perfect man, Jesus God's precious Son, taking our place, our punishment on the Cross, achieves the reality of atonement to which this chapter points forward!

Conclusion

- So, thank you Lord!
- Do we accept atonement, our debts paid for us?
 - or will we pridefully try and pay off our debt ourselves?