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Presentation Transcript
Sacrificial Love – Day of Atonement
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The Day of Atonement is special among biblical festivals. One Atonement, we're told to fast, but not on any other day. Fasting on this day is kind of like a marker, or a sign post, or a banner. It's says, "Pay attention to this! It's important." Why would that be? Well today, we're going to rehearse the story of what this day signifies in God's plan.

Did you know that each of the biblical festivals portrays a step in God's salvation plan? If you never heard that before, then you're in for a surprise and a treat. It's a gift from God really, because it's through these days that we understand what God is doing and in what order. So let's get started.

Let's begin in Leviticus 16, verse 1. We're going all the way back to when God was leading the children of Israel through the wilderness.

Leviticus 16:1-6 – *The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died – you'll remember that unfortunate incident where they thought they knew more than God. 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." So we're talking about that special place inside the tabernacle – the tent building – that God gave them, that they carried with them in the wilderness – and the place where the mercy seat was placed on the ark. And He told them that nobody should go in there, except Aaron once a year. "For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. 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, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban. These are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house."*

So *atonement* – what does that mean? This is the way that God taught these ancient people that sin was bad, and that it was expensive – that it costs a lot when people sin – that God’s laws are always *good* for us, and they show a way to go that we can live a life without pain and suffering. And when they did that, back then, when they sinned, they had to pay for it by offering animals out of their herds. It was a financial drain for them.

V-6-10 – *“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house.”* So, when he goes in there, he atones first for his own sins, as the spiritual leader of the people – the priest. *“Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting.”* So this is outside. *“And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness – and that will be put on Azazel.”*

Now during the time of the second temple – the one the Jews built after returning from captivity – a lot of detail was added to their oral law about the departure of the *Azazel* goat. And it became custom that he was taken by the designated person, who passed by ten stations, each associated with various customary issues. And at the end, he was pushed off a steep cliff to die. None of this is in the Bible. Most of us who are Christian would not accept that as anything more than added ritual – part of the oral law. And you know, the oral law was something Jesus was not always approving of, as He walked the earth at the end of the second temple period. When people start adding stuff to the Bible, in an attempt to clarify or make it better, they usually wind up messing things up.

So let’s jump to the contemporary Jewish view now. And the reason I read you that is to show you something about this biblical explanation. It’s not really clear to us today exactly what they did or why they did it. It just says, “This is what you should do.” Aaron’s supposed to go inside the Holy Place and offer for himself, and then he’s to come out and pray over these two goats. One is to be sacrificed on the spot, and the other is to have the sins of the nation prayed on to him, and he’s taken away out into the wilderness. As time went on, they pushed him off a cliff, though it doesn’t say to do that in the Bible. So the Jews today are still keeping the Day of Atonement, as well as some few Christians. And, in their way of looking at it, it’s a day to acknowledge our need for a close relationship with God – the need to repent of sins that always separate us from God. It’s somewhat like the Church of God way of seeing Passover and Unleavened Bread. We see that time as the time to acknowledge Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. He was *the* sacrifice. All these other sacrifices just looked forward to Him. And Unleavened Bread was when we pictured living sin free. It’s interesting, too, that when you think about Leviticus 16, it’s interesting to know that the Jews believe a lot of different things about Leviticus 16, just like the Church of God has. Some people think that one goat pictures Christ, and the other goat the devil. Some people think both goats picture Christ. We’re not the only

ones that have struggled with what this means.

In preparation for this presentation, I found an article on the Web about the meaning of the Day of Atonement. And the author, who is, I think, pretty well-known in Jewish circles, quote a Jewish authority, who saw the two goats as symbolic of the two losses in Abraham's life – Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham thought that he was going to have to sacrifice Isaac. It turned out he didn't, but it was as good as done in his mind, and so all the anguish that goes with him. And Ishmael he sent away into the wilderness. So there's the reason the commentator believes that. In the comments section about the article, there was a lot of divisive opinion about it.

While I think it's interesting to consider what the Jews believe, since Paul tells us that, to them, God entrusted the oracles of God, it's also interesting that they, like the Messianic, and like the Church of God people, have differing thoughts on what the day might mean, as far as the goats go. I think most of us all believe that it has to do with becoming closer to God through sacrifice of Christ. And that's why this is such a special day. There is something special about that that we'll talk about in a few minutes, however.

If you're interested in the link I was talking about, it's too long for me to spell it out for all of you. So, if you're interested, you can find it on the LifeResource Website under this presentation. Look for the subtitle *For Further Consideration* and you'll find the link there.

Now let's move to the New Testament. There's an interesting passage in Hebrews 9. Paul does something that's absolutely astounding here. And it's been here in the New Testament ever since the New Testament was put together. Yet I've never really heard ministers from any other church but mine talk about the special meaning of this. So something that has been lost on Christianity since nearly the beginning of Christianity is here. Paul uses the Day of Atonement in this passage to explain Jesus Christ to the church. What does that mean? Well, what it means is this: The Day of Atonement has *always* been about Jesus from the very beginning. When those Hebrews covered with dust from walking in the desert all day thought about the Day of Atonement, they didn't know that it was picturing something else. That was put in there for us today. So the Day of Atonement is a celebration – it's an observance – that's about Jesus Christ and yet no Christians, to speak of, observe it. And that's a very interesting situation. What it tells us is that, before He came, it was a predictor of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. And, after He came, it's a biblical festival that Christians need to keep to understand what He has done and will yet do.

Let's read what it says. Now this is a long passage – you might tune out, but that's on you. It's my job to explain it, and it's your job to pay attention. I'll try to stop from time to time and elaborate.

Hebrews 9:-1-5 – *Now even the first covenant – that's the covenant of Moses – had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which*

were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. We just read about that in the 16th chapter of Leviticus. *Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.* See, I thought he just did. That's probably the clearest explanation in the entire Bible of what was inside the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. But he apparently knew a lot more than that about it. But that has been lost to us in history. But he points us to this tabernacle that God gave to ancient Israel. Then he goes on in verse 6:

V-6-10 – *These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.* So there's that Holy Place, where the priests regularly went, but inside that curtain – inside the veil – only the high priest, and only once a year, and he had to take blood from a sacrifice with him to cover his own sins and for the people. So this is a once a year thing. It's a very big deal to them and to us. *By this the Holy Spirit indicates* – says Paul – *that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).* According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink – and I'm putting in parentheses here (offerings) – *and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.* So all these sacrifices they did in the Old Testament, those were just temporary until Christ came – till things were reformed by a new covenant – because all those sacrifices pointed to Him. And he's telling us that, as we look back on it from the vantage point through the eyes of the Holy Spirit given to the church on the Day of Pentecost, which, to further drive home the point, is another biblical festival that supersedes the Old Testament and is part of Christianity today. He points out that all the things the Jews did related to temple worship, sacrifices, offerings, regulations for the body, the garb the priests wore, etcetera – all that – was imposed only until Christ came. And what time was that? Well, Paul's going to tell us more about that as we go. Verse 11:

V-11-12 – *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent – or tabernacle – (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.* So you see, all those goats and cows that were slaughtered, all the Days of Atonement they had and one of the goats was taken out into the wilderness, all that was picturing Jesus Christ and His high priesthood and a new covenant. And the sacrifice in that covenant is Jesus Himself, not animals. So that ancient tabernacle and the later temple were all pointing toward the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But they were not *the* sacrifice. He was. Verse 13:

V-13-14 - *For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh – that was for back then – how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works – notice why that’s important – to purify our conscience from dead works, so that we – serve the living God. See, that’s the outcome of it all. We’re supposed to serve God because of what Jesus for us.*

So what’s left then? Well, Christ ushered in the time of reformation. He is the sacrifice, the temple – the tabernacle – the sacrifices, they all passed into history because they were superseded by Christ’s sacrifice. Now, when I say, “They passed into history,” did you know that after Jesus returns, there’s going to be a temple built again? Did you know that all these same sacrifices are going to be offered again? So all the people that stand up and pontificate on Sunday morning about that old law, and how it was a slavery and a burden to everybody, they’re going to be doing that again, provided they are able to be there. And I wouldn’t have any doubt that they would be.

So we have the day – the Day of Atonement – in which we can learn about what Jesus did for us, unless of course we’re not willing to keep that day, like Jesus Himself did as our example, and as His disciples did, and as the New Testament church did. Let’s look in verse 15:

V-15 – *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant....*

V-23-24 - *Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. So the blood that was sprinkled on the people, and the blood that was for Aaron’s atonement – all those things – we’re now sprinkled with better sacrifices than those – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands – the old temple and tabernacle – which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. He’s our intermediary. He’s the one that goes before God with our prayers and asks God to hear them. He’s on our side. He’s been where we’ve been. And He comes to God on our behalf as our High Priest. So Jesus is now our High Priest, who intercedes for us with the Father. And then in verse 25:*

V-25-26 – *Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, 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. So one sacrifice on the stake in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago and that took care of all the sins that have ever been committed and all the sins that will ever be committed, as long as they are repented of.*

So it seems that this is the greatest festival of all, because it looks back on Jesus’ sacrifice for all of us – not just in the past, but for all of us now and on into the future.

Before going on, look with me at something Jesus said while He was walking the earth – one of the most explanatory scriptures about what God has on His mind. You know, when you think about all the terrible things that people have done down through the ages, and all the sins we commit daily without even realizing it, how is God ever going to get all of us lined up together with Him? Well, in John 12:31, Jesus said,

John 12:31-32 – *“Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”* All that sin is going to stop. And the one who caused it all is going to be taken care of. You know, Jesus hardly ever talked about His sacrifice without talking about the ruler of this world and the one who caused all the trouble. *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*

Because His sacrifice is so powerful, so loving, eventually people will reject the ways of the ruler of this world – our adversary – and choose to follow Jesus. There’s no other religion that has anything like this in it. It’s just amazing that God speaks to us through the words of His Bible. And Jesus explains that the reason He had to die that terrible death of crucifixion was to prove to people beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was the real deal, and that He could be trusted, and that He has a way of solving people’s problems and pulling them together. In the end, people are all going to get that. They’re going to be drawn to Him. He’s not going to make anybody do anything. It’s all our choice. But He has a way of drawing people to Him.

Since He came to set an example of how we ought to walk through our lives, we are to focus on that sacrificial aspect of God’s love. He was our sacrificial Lamb. And we’re to be like Him. Right? We’re to be sacrificial. Do we want our children, our mates, our friends to follow Jesus? Do we want to be a light to the world? Then sacrificing for others – taking care of others – needs to be an intentional part of our lives.

My brother and I just came back from a camping trip up in Wyoming. We figured out if you go after the season’s over, the campground is still open, but there’s not many people there. And we met this guy. He was driving a little old Saturn and he had a 300 pound trailer he was pulling behind it. It was a very small, tiny trailer – two-wheel trailer – and it was just big enough to have a bed in it and a place to stand up. It would fold down flat and then it would open up kind of like a tent with a peak on it so that he could stand up inside it. He traveled around the country because he liked to travel. He didn’t have a lot of money. He was trying to live on the smallest amount of money he could. He told me that his house was seven feet by seven feet – one room – and that he saved all his money from Social Security so that he could travel. He told me all these money-saving things he did. He said it cost him...his house, utilities and taxes – all included – cost him \$150.00 a month. I asked him what he did when he wasn’t traveling, since he didn’t have to work, and he said that he went to a community center and helped there. He mentioned that he’d met a man there, who was disabled, and every week he would go pick this man up and they would go out to McDonald’s and have a dollar hamburger and dollar fries and talk. So he’d

found a way – outside of any systems, outside of any external controls – to live, to exist, to enjoy his life and to help other people. He told me some other things that he did – where he would sacrifice his time and his income – meager though it was – to help other people. I might mention this one thing, for those that are interested. He said that every year in December, Wendy’s hamburgers has a thing where, if you pay two dollars that’s donated to charity, they will give you free Frosties for the rest of the year – not big Frosties, but small. He said, “That’s all I need.” So that gives you the idea of what his life is like. He’s always cutting corners. Very interesting person – really nice person to know.

Being a parent is a sacrificial job. I was talking to a twenty-year-old recently, and she seemed down and sad – burdened. She, I think, by nature is rather retiring and an introvert – very intelligent, but has a hard time with large groups and intense emotion. She was the last of seven children, and after she was born, her parents adopted two more. The last one was a girl. She was what we call today, a meth baby. Her mother was addicted to methamphetamine, so that got into this girl’s system. As she’s growing older, she’s had a terrible time regulating her own emotions and a lot of her thoughts, I’ve noticed, are kind of loose. They don’t connect right. She, as a part of that family, would go off on everybody frequently. She told everyone in her family that she wished she could go to Mexico City and live with her addict mother on the streets, instead of living with them. She told them she didn’t love them and that she just wants to run away, etcetera. And my client, the twenty-year-old, told me that she loved her little sister, but worries about her, and at the same time, being around her sister is toxic to her. She said, “I feel so guilty.” I told her that the fact that she feels guilty is proof of how much she loves her, in spite of how cruelly her sister has treated her. You know, most people would feel the least bit guilty about staying away from her. At one point in our discussion, she blurted out, “I just wish I could do something to help her.” So that’s a really good example to me of sacrificial love in today’s world. If she knew what to do, she’d do it, even if it cost her a lot herself.

So let’s move forward. The Day of Atonement also point toward the future. Verse 27 – we’re still reading Hebrews 9:

Hebrews 9:27 – *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting His return.* So there’s the difference, really, between Passover and Atonement. Passover is a very *personal* thing. It’s where we reflect about our own sins, I think. We are to do that on Atonement, too, but this is about the many. *So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.*

So, you know, it says that we are saved by His life. We know He’s alive and we’re waiting for him to return. The fact that He’s still alive is what saves us. So no need to do the sacrifices every year. He did it once for all and for all time. He’s not concerned with sacrifice for sin anymore. That part is a done deal. It’s been accomplished. All that was just a pointer toward His ultimate

sacrifice for us – all the things they did back then. And this is what we learn when we observe the Day of Atonement now. It's all about Jesus – His sacrifice – and to assemble those who eagerly await His return, and then, ultimately, all people, as they have their opportunity to learn about it. So today, now still points forward – to the future – the time when He will return to unite everybody – to all of us who eagerly await it.

People have asked me in the past, “Why are there two holy days that focus on repentance and Christ’s sacrifice?” Well, I think we, in part, already explained that. We can see the seven annual festivals divided into two categories. Passover, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost are about the present age, no matter what part of that time you’ve lived in it. The sacrifice, the response to it – which is to be living an unleavened life – and also the church and our life in it. Then later, with Trumpets, Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day, we see a second category, or type, of holy day. These festivals look past the present age to the time when Christ returns. Atonement is in that time. It’s at that time the whole world will begin to draw close to God, as a few of us have in this present age. Now I say a few. There may be millions, but certainly not billions. They’re going to become a greater harvest in the future. And Atonement seems to be about the global ramifications of what Christ’s sacrifice was for and how it will affect all it.

So it’s fitting, since Atonement is looking toward the future, that we look into Revelation – to Revelation 20. This is after Christ has returned and after the resurrection of the saints. The whole earth is now under God’s authority – something we’ve been waiting for for a long time. This world was once all His. To work His plan, He surrendered it temporarily to us, and to our free will, and to that of our adversary, who Jesus calls the ruler of this world now. And by the time we come to the future fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, He’s taken it all back. Paul talked about a time in the future called the *restitution of all things*. And that’s what this day is all about.

Revelation 20:1-3 – *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.* Now, in the context, Jesus Christ has already returned. The Feast of Trumpets, which comes just before Atonement, is about the return of Christ. And Atonement is about what happens right after that. *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer....* You recall the scripture we just read, where Jesus said, because of His atoning sacrifice, the ruler of this world will be cast out and everyone will be drawn to Him. This festival is about that time. Verse 4:

V-4-6 – *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.* They had not capitulated to the system that is going to come on the earth just prior Christ’s return. *They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection.* So the fact that there’s a first implies a

second, doesn't it? And that means there are people who are going to be dead that *aren't* resurrected in this resurrection, because this is a resurrection only for the people who surrendered to Jesus Christ – not the people who went to this or that church. It's not about being in an organization. It's about your relationship with Jesus Christ and how you follow Him. *Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power....* You mean men are going to live a life, and then die, and then be resurrected, and then some of them are going to die again – a second death? Well, if you come up in this first resurrection, you're not going to be subject to the second death. It has no power over you, because you will be an eternal being in that resurrection. *...they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

At that time, the term *at one with God* will take on a meaning, the likes of which no one has ever seen before, because the *whole* earth, and the people in it, will worship God of their own accord freely. And His way will proliferate and so will the blessings that come from it.

So we have all gathered here today to celebrate a day that has been kept for thousands of years, and a day that has always pointed toward the loving sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God and the outcomes that will flow from it – a day that has Jesus Christ interwoven into its purpose – a Day of Atonement.

Don't forget to comment on our Website. You may also want to look up our Podcasts at the Apple Store. And remember the link I mentioned that you can find on the Website as well.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.