

Let's talk about Jesus (5)

We're at number five in our short series, Let's talk about Jesus. I've enjoyed it immensely, I hope you have been blessed and enriched as well. We've been looking together at what we often call the Levitical offerings ...

Now, here's an easy way to remember them: we have five fingers on each hand—one, the burnt offering; two, the grain or meal offering; three, the peace or fellowship offering; four, the sin offering; and, today's one, number five, is the trespass or guilt offering.

In every study we have been contemplating the cross. Our experience is akin to that of the hymn writer when he said: I sometimes think about his cross, And shut my eyes and try to see, The cruel nails, the crown of thorns, And Jesus crucified for me.

Another golden oldie springs to mind—it's a succinct summary of the ground we've covered so far: Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away one stain, but Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away—a sacrifice of nobler name, and richer blood than they!

The apostle Peter was singing from the same page in the song sheet when he wrote in his first epistle, chapter 2, verse 24: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.' That's the trespass offering or the guilt offering as we know it!

This one is hugely important! Someone has wisely said that 'grace is dangerous.' The reason behind that gem of a comment is that all too often people want to push back the boundaries, to

Leviticus 5:14-6:7

move the goalposts, to take advantage of God's outrageous grace. You see, because of his astonishing grace, you and I can enjoy and experience forgiveness when we confess our sin to the Lord. That's the marvel of God's unconditional love. That's grace, pure and simple. When that happens, however, we run the serious risk of undermining God's grace, of treating it as a novel way to get us off the hook, of reducing it to a cheap commodity, the kind of thing you can buy on a supermarket shelf. It is to guard against that mindset that we have the trespass offering. In a nutshell, that is what the guilt offering is fighting against—it's a kind of counter-balance. Grace is free, but it's not cheap!

There are three main lines of thought we wish to follow in this potentially life-changing study: one, **the trespasses that are embraced by this offering.**

Basically, there were three categories of sin dealt with by this offering. There is the sin of sacrilege in 5:14-16; the sin of disobedience in 5:17-19; and, the sin of unfaithfulness in 6:1-7.

It's interesting to notice that when a man sins against the Lord in holy things, it is often seen as 'unintentional', we see that in verse 15; the concept is expanded somewhat in verse 17, where we read: 'if a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, [and here's the telltale phrase] even though he does not know it.'

However, when one person sins against another person he is not given the benefit of the doubt, per se. It is seen as something deliberate and

intentional – he has chosen to act in this way, this person made a conscious decision to engage in such appalling behaviour. Much of this is summed up in the well-worn cliché ... taking people to the cleaners! It's a breach of faith.

We know that from what the biblical text says: 'If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbour about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do ...'

The bottom line is, when such a man overstepped the mark and went outside the parameters of the law of God, he had no one to blame but himself. As before, with the sin offering, there was no other way for that individual to get right with God, than for him to do what God decreed. He had no option but to toe God's party line.

If the sinning Israelite wanted to know forgiveness, there were certain steps that had to be taken—I'll talk about some of them in a few minutes time, but the important thing here is that he had to bring 'a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value' (that's in 6:6).

The man had to swallow his pride, eat humble pie, and make a valiant effort to get things sorted out. His guilt could only be effectively dealt with by the shedding of blood, hence the trespass offering! The same is true for us today—when we sin against the Lord, thank God, we can turn to him and find forgiveness through the washing and cleansing of his precious blood (that's what 1 John 1:9 is all about).

That thought is captured by the old gospel hymn, when it says: They are nailed to the cross, they are nailed to the cross, O how much he was willing to bear! With what anguish and loss, Jesus went to the cross, and he carried my sins with him there!

Let's backtrack for a moment, and ask the pertinent question: how can a man trespass in holy things? for that's the gist of what Moses writes about at the end of chapter 5.

I think it can be explained by three examples from the Old Testament scriptures. The first one involves Moses in Deuteronomy 32. You will recall that God told him to speak to the rock and then water would gush out—well, what did Moses do? He struck it! Yes, that's precisely what he did and, in so doing, he attempted to do God's work his way. Into the bargain, he also marred the type of Christ.

Another example surrounds Achan in Joshua 7. He went a step too far and trespassed and, as a spin-off, the whole camp was corrupted. It's the leaven principle! He took the Babylonish garment, plus some gold and silver, and hid them; these things appealed to him, these goods were incredibly attractive and belonged to the world.

The third illustration is that of Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26. He was hailed as a great man, a good king, and a gifted person. There were many accolades coming his way, but one day he put his big feet in it. That's when he offered incense—he tried to do the work of a priest, something he wasn't called to do in the first place! A kind of round peg in a square hole, only worse!

It seems to me that each of these guys had one factor in common—they trespassed in holy

things. The flesh got the upper hand with Moses, the world got the better of Mr Achan, and the wily devil secured a foothold in the life of King Uzziah. A trio of enemies—each one failed!

Today, we deal with the same set of enemies, and their tactics are similar, they haven't changed that much down the years – they know our personal Achilles heel. We need to be on guard lest the enemy strike a fatal blow; we need to keep short accounts with God and always ensure that the lines of communication are open! We are engaged in hostilities with the great adversary, but, thank God, there's victory in Jesus!

Time to move on ... the second point is this:

the truth that is eminent in this offering.

We hear echoes of it in chapter 5 verse 15, where it talks about a person bringing an offering, and I quote: '... of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel.' There was no way he could short-change the priest who was ministering that day. The offender had to pay up! God had been robbed, so God had to be repaid! The value of the offering would be determined by the priest on duty—he is seen as someone who has the mind of God. He's in touch with the Almighty, he's in tune with heaven. From another angle, that is a powerful indicator that the Lord alone knows the value and worth of the offering made on Calvary's dark, lonely hillside.

That begs the question: how did God show us his estimation? We have the answer in Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 2:9. The grand hymn sums it up eloquently in these matchless words: Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious, see the Man of Sorrows now, from the fight return victorious,

every knee to him shall bow. Crown him, crown him, crowns become the Victor's brow.

The third main point is:

the triumph that is emphasised through this offering.

It has to be said, this is where the guilt/trespass offering is staggeringly unique—no other offering has this criteria attached to it. We know from 5:16 and 6:4-5 that something extra was required.

Let me share one verse with you: 'He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven.'

One word says it all—it's the word, restitution! A simple and straightforward equation was employed – a 20% levy on top of the initial value! It's important to note that restitution had to be made before the sacrifice was offered—O yes, putting matters right with someone else was as essential as putting matters right with God.

This showed the genuineness of the guilty Israelite—his action indicated, this guy means business and he is truly sorry for doing the dirty on a neighbour or whoever. It was only at that point that he could enter into the spirit of Henry Francis Lyte's hymn, which has a majestic couple of lines: Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Who like thee his praise should sing?

I suppose we could summarise it like this: God gained more through the sacrifice than he lost through the sin.

So, the question on everyone's lips is, what did God gain? Let's go back to the earliest days to Adam in the idyllic garden of Eden. It was honky-

dory, then, one day he succumbed to the tempter and fell. He was never the same from that day forward and he left a legacy that has impacted every generation since. He was a man totally depraved, to use a theological term; then he was clothed by God. That's a quick résumé of the story.

Before Adam sinned, he knew the power and wisdom of God. No doubts about that! After Adam sinned, he was acquainted with the love of God, the grace of God, and the mercy of God. The reality is that after the event our man Adam can praise God in a way that he couldn't have done before he blew it. In that sense, God gained!

Allied to that is another question: what did Jesus gain? Well, because of Calvary, the angels worship him. All the saints down through the ages sing his praises. But, most of all and best of all, he gained a Bride, the church that bears his name.

What did the saints gain? Wow! Justified, perfected for ever, adopted into his international family, clothed in his garments of righteousness, forgiven—all this, and so, so much more! My friend, we have gained everything!

A last question: what has the world gained? It has been on the receiving end of so much goodness from the Lord's own people—we have impacted this world and we have influenced every generation. We have made our mark for God.

There is salt and light. It's terribly bad is our world, but it would be horrendously worse if we were not in it!

We've come to the end of our series, Let's talk about Jesus! Our heartfelt desire was to see Christ in each of the offerings, and I think we've

achieved that goal—you can't miss him, he's there in every one! Five offerings, yet all point in one direction to one offering, and that is Jesus. When Christ was hanging on the cross at Calvary, one offering pictured the five, turn with me to Isaiah 53.

In verse 10a, we see the Burnt Offering; in verse 11, we see the Grain or Meal Offering; in verse 5b, we see the Peace or Fellowship Offering; in verse 10b, we see the Sin Offering; and, in verse 5a, we see the Guilt or Trespass Offering. They are all there in one Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever we need is found in him, and in he alone!

The hymn sums it up so beautifully and so well: Here we see the dawn of heaven, while upon the cross we gaze, see our trespasses forgiven, and our songs of triumph raise.

My friend, let's talk about Jesus, let's talk to Jesus, and let's tell the world about Jesus!