

The Cost of Forgiveness – Jesus in Exodus and Leviticus

Creekside Community Church, San Leandro, California

Greg V. Arthur, June 19, 2016

John 1:29 ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Eph 1:7-10 - ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Creekside, I'm Greg Arthur, one of the pastors here. And as you may have noticed, it's Father's Day. And because dads since the beginning of time have been given ties for Father's Day, I've asked the men at Creekside, who have completed or are in the queue to complete one of our fatherly leadership scriptural training courses ... I've asked them to wear a tie today for Father's Day, the more outlandish the better. In fact, there is a small competition involved here, where the man wearing the absolute best tie today will be awarded this gift pack of aftershave, BBQ sauce, and socks. Omar Bryan said he was going to unleash the kraken of bowties. And I am rising to the challenge with this Hopi bolo that I bought in Arizona for myself 35 years ago while in college. So fathers, look around, and then just come up after the service to claim your prize if you think yours is the best.

One Spoon

Today we're going to look at Exodus and Leviticus, the second and third books of the Bible, that tell of the birth of the nation of Israel, the chosen people of God. Be honest, how many of you turn to these books for your daily devotionals. That's what I thought. Me neither. Anyway, I'd like to start with a story that is about forgiveness because God's forgiveness of sins is a central theme of Exodus and Leviticus. And as the story unfolds and as we go through scriptures, I'd like to ask you to keep in mind one question: What does it take to forgive?

What does it take to forgive? My grandfather in the Philippines, Venancio Lim, was an engineer who ran a power company when the war broke out. The Japanese quickly captured the Philippines and occupied Manila. Everyone remembers Pearl Harbor. Few know that Manila was also bombed the very same day at the start of the war. My mom told me of her experience growing up as a little girl during occupation, but the story was so harrowing that when she was old and told me her story, she said, "I'm only telling this once." She never breathed a word of the war again. Toward the end of the war, like many civic leaders, my grandfather and a close friend of his were imprisoned in the infamous Fort Santiago prison. He withered away to weigh 80 lbs. As the US Army approached to recapture Manila, and because all knew the Japanese would not leave prisoners alive, and because everyone was short of food, my grandmother had her best friend bribe the Japanese general's wife with sacks of rice for the release of my grandfather and his friend. You won't believe this but my

grandmother's best friend was a classmate of the Japanese general's wife at Mills College in the 1920's. So Venancio Lim and his friend were released after more than a year in prison just ahead of the American liberation of Manila. He lay in bed for 10 months recovering from the torture and starvation, while around him his nation was in ruins.

What does it take to forgive?

One Story

Through the summer, we are going to go through the Old Testament in a series entitled "Hero: Jesus in the Old Testament". We are looking at the whole Bible for what it is, one unified story, God's story about the unfolding redemption of mankind through Christ, told in the way God wants to tell it through these 66 books written by 40 authors over 1,600 years. There is a truth about God behind this unified view of the Bible, that **God is sovereign**. What do we mean by saying God is sovereign? It is simply this: God is in control. He is in control of human history. He is in control of the future. He is in control of the heavens and the earth all that is upon the earth. He is in control eras and moments, of kings and sparrows. I've found as I've gotten older that when I look back 15 years or so, I can see it, God's perfect control of my life to bring me to the point of redemption I enjoy today. As He says through the Prophet Isaiah:

Is 46:8-10 - Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. ⁹Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'

This also necessarily means then that God is in control of the writing of the Bible, that it says just what He wants it to say. It's true there were 40 authors of scripture who wrote down national histories like Exodus, and law like Leviticus, biographical narratives like Luke, wisdom like Proverbs, poetry like Psalms, prophecy like Isaiah, and epistles like Romans. But together, since God is in control of the writing of the Bible, they actually wrote God's story, and told it in His voice for His purposes and all His pleasure. In other words, the sovereign God is the author of the Bible. The Bible is His Word. As it says in Paul's second letter to Timothy, "*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*" ¹

And there is a second truth about God behind this view of the Bible as one story, that **God is gracious**. The scriptures are at its heart a story of His grace toward us -- of how it is His nature to love with compassion; of how He forgives sinners, and gives rest to the weary, favors the weak, cares for the sick, heals the brokenhearted, cleanses the unrighteous, frees the captives, defends the poor, shelters the exile, finds the lost, and raises the dead; of how He liberates a world in rebellion, one forgiven rebel at a time; of how He purchases the release of slaves enslaved to sin and death, one forgiven captive at a time; of how He safeguards His flock with His own life, one forgiven sheep at a time; of how He restores humanity from a state of infidelity to marriage with Him, one forgiven wayward soul at a time.

¹ 2Tim 3:16

And the Bible says the executor of God's redemption story of grace is Christ Jesus, the King, the Emancipator, the Good Shepherd, the Bridegroom, ... the Son of God, and Son of Man, the Lord and Savior, and, significant to what we are going to look at today, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. So a third truth behind the view of the Bible as one story, is that God's redemption story, *the Bible is about Christ Jesus* and not about us. Jesus is the Hero of the Bible, who because He "has power on earth to forgive sins"², redeems the whole world.

Eph 1:7-10 - ⁷In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

From start to finish, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible says the story of the redemption of sinners is tied to His grace toward us which is tied to the forgiveness of sins. God's redemption story proclaimed in the Bible is in essence about His forgiveness.

So we come back to the initial question. What does it take to forgive? What does it cost to forgive someone of the wrongs they have done? What does it mean that in Christ "we have redemption through His blood?" Does it cost blood to forgive sins? Does it cost His blood? What's the connection between forgiveness and blood? Just what does it take to forgive?

We saw last week in Genesis that this redemption story begins at the dawn of human history when God announced His divine solution to the fall, written in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

Gen 3:14-15 - ¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent ... ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

The Bible says that right from the start, the Lord God proclaims what the final score will be. The Seed of the woman will crush the head of the devil. Christ Jesus, the Son of Man, a human being, the Seed of the woman, will defeat Satan and redeem the human race. Christ wins. That will be the final score. And as history unfolds, God reveals more about this redemption in Christ of the fallen human race. Through Abraham and Isaac, God proclaims that He Himself will provide a divine way of redemption, when He provided a "ram caught in a thicket by its horns" as Abraham's sacrifice, instead of Isaac, his son.

Gen 22:14 - ¹⁴ Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord Will Provide, as it is said in this (Moses') day, "In the mount of the Lord, it will be provided."

And on through the Old Testament, through the deliverance of Israel out of bondage, through judges, and kings, through captivity and exile, and through the prophets, God keeps unfolding

² Mark 2:10

more and more about His redemption story in Christ Jesus, culminating in the last prophet, John the Baptist, who upon seeing Jesus approaching Him near says:

John 1:29 ²⁹ ... "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

So in the story of redemption, how do we get from the Seed of the woman to the Lamb of God, from Christ will defeat Satan and the Lord will provide the sacrifice, to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? That is what God reveals in Exodus and Leviticus.

On their face, these two Old Testament books don't seem like proclamations of God about Christ Jesus redeeming the fallen human race. But now as we go through highlights from these two books, I hope that we will be able to see just how great the redemption plan is, how it is perfect, complete, full of grace, and full of justice, and especially why the plan comes to completion in Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who proclaimed as His last words before dying on the cross, "It is finished."³ I hope we will be astonished by Christ, saying "He does all things well,"⁴ those who were with when He walked in Galilee.

One Solution

The story in Exodus is pretty familiar. Hollywood loves this story, from Cecil B. DeMille's classic, "The Ten Commandments," to the Disney animated masterpiece, "The Prince of Egypt", to the flawed and more recent "Exodus: Gods and Kings." The story starts with the Jews prospering in Egypt to become a numerous people, effectively a nation within a nation. For 430 years in Egypt, since Jacob's sons left Canaan, the Lord protected the Jews from annihilation, thereby preserving the line of the seed of the woman which leads to Christ Jesus. The Egyptians eventually enslave the Jews, fearing their power and their "strength in numbers" as we say here in the East Bay. The Lord God hears their cry for deliverance and announces to Moses at the burning bush His plan to send Moses to demand the Pharaoh of Egypt to release the sons of Israel from bondage. Moses asks the Lord God His name, and He replies, "I AM Who I AM," a name Christ alludes to as his own, when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."⁵

And you know the story, Pharaoh won't release Israel even after the Lord inflicts upon Egypt nine supernatural plagues -- water to blood, swarms of frogs, swarms of lice, swarms of flies, infectious disease upon livestock, boils, thunder and hail, an infestation of locust, and three days of darkness.⁶ And then the tenth plague:

Ex 11:1-12:32 – ^{11:4} Moses said, "Thus says the Lord, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, ^{11:5} and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the

³ John 19:30

⁴ Mark 7:37

⁵ John 8:58

⁶ Ex 7:19, 2-8:2-4, 8:16, 8:21, 9:3, 9:8-9, 9:18, 10:4-5, 10:21-22

cattle as well' ... ^{12:3} 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, ... ^{12:5} Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; ... ^{12:6} You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ^{12:7} Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it ... ^{12:12} For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments, I am the Lord. ^{12:13} The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy when I strike the land of Egypt.' ... ^{12:28} The sons of Israel went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ^{12:29} Now it came about at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. ^{12:30} Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. ^{12:31} Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel."

Now there are many more chapters of Exodus and Leviticus to go. And there are too many other allusions to Christ to mention. But I would like to stop here for now and closely look at the main thread having to do with Christ Jesus. For I think God is further unfolding a very key aspect of His redemption story in Christ, and doing so by providing an answer to the question, what does it take to forgive?

The Nature of Sin

In any illicit transgression, there is a perpetrator and a victim. It does not matter the transgression. It could be trivial. When I was eight I stole an old 1912 penny from a baby sitter's change jar. It could be monumental like the imprisonment of my grandfather and the devastation of his nation. It could be lying, infidelity, murder, child sacrifice, or worse. In every transgression there is a perpetrator and a victim. Moreover, the Bible calls these transgressions, sins, and that every wrong committed against someone is fundamentally a sin against God. As David said to God in Ps 51, after committing adultery and arranging the death in battle of her husband:

Ps 51:3-4 – ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight,

And if every sin is against God, then every sin is deserving death, for the Bible says "the wages of sin are death."⁷ In other words, this is a grave problem for the human race that all of us, because of sin, are under a death sentence, a death sentence that each must pay.

So I think there are two unsatisfying ways that we, the human race, naturally come up to deal with our sin. First, nearly everyone comes up with some internal system of atonement,

⁷ Rom 6:23

where the one who commits a sin either tries to make it right, or has to suffer retribution. This is the eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth, life-for-a-life it's-only-fair system of justice. And while it may be fair, it is destructive, inflicting retribution back-and-forth, and more importantly cannot nullify the death sentence. Furthermore, it's not possible to atone for sins which cause losses greater than one life. I heard this point made while on the jury in a capital murder trial. The perpetrator murdered three people. The prosecutor argued for the death penalty saying life in prison for the first murder is just since the defendant loses his life for taking a life. But then he asked what about the other two he murdered, "were they free? Are their lives worth nothing?"

Second, nearly everyone imagines that God could simply overlook transgressions. But this can never work. In essence, to overlook a transgression means any victim of sin has to give up the desire for justice and settle for a passive God of injustice. If after the war, in the war crimes trials against Japan, if all the other countries of the world said to the Philippine delegation, that sure, war is hell and the Japanese were particularly cruel, but so what, get over it, from your ruin rebuild yourself, there would have been an impossible future. For God to overlook sin means there are no wrongs righted, no healing of the victims, no reform of the perpetrators, no repair of broken relationships. Chaos reigns. Injustice wins. Sin is the way the truth and the life. The devil crushes the head of the seed of the woman. It's that bad. ... and that wrong, for God is just and does indeed take sin seriously. Imagining that He doesn't cannot nullify the death sentence for sin that we are under. As He says through the Prophet Ezekiel, "The person who sins will die." ⁸

In the same way, overlooking the sin committed against us and the suffering it causes is a grave injustice. Yet many of us attempt to do this, to punish ourselves, to harm ourselves, to blame ourselves for sins others have done, to take upon ourselves the weight of the world. We are not made to silently take the suffering of the sins committed against us;

Ps 71:12-13 - ¹² O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help!
¹³ Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me.

And many of us slough off the devastation of our own sin as if it is unimportant. That's just how things are. They need to adjust. They just need to suck it up. But we aren't made to silently ignore our own sin that is in us.

Ps 32:3-4 - ³ When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long ... ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You ... I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" and You forgave the guilt of my sin.

If it is impossible for sinners to pay for their sins, and it is, then it is doubly impossible for victims to pay for someone else's.

So two ways people often ineffectively deal with sin are: (1) a system of making up for or paying for transgressions, and (2) imagining that God could simply overlook transgressions.

⁸ Ez 18:20

Substitutionary Sacrifice for Sin

And now there is a third way to deal with sin. Expressed right here in our passages for today in Ex 12, God Himself introduces the idea that a blood sacrifice could right wrongs.

Ex 12:13 – ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy when I strike the land of Egypt.’

God instructs the nation of Israel to kill lambs, male, and without blemish, one per household, and to paint the doorways into their houses with the blood of the lambs. And as the Lord God goes through Egypt judging the people and the land, He passes over the houses of the Jews who by faith did what He said to do. While as it says in the scriptures that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” ⁹ those sinners, who showed faith in God with the blood of an innocent lamb on their homes, were not judged. In fact, they were released from bondage to the Egyptians, walking out under the protection of the Lord God who went “before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light,” ¹⁰ through the wilderness and right through the Red Sea on dry land.

So it is here in the second book of the Bible, that God introduces the next key aspect of His unfolding plan for the redemption of mankind from sin and death. Since sinners are under a death sentence for their sins, and that it is justice for each sinner to die for their own sins, God proclaims for the first time that an innocent party, the Passover Lamb, can be sacrificed in their place as fulfillment of the death sentence, with blood of the lamb displayed to clearly show for all to see the death of the lamb. Moreover, since it was one Passover Lamb per household, God says His redemption of sinners through this substitutionary sacrifice fulfills the many death sentences of the whole household.

This is the way God decided to redeem mankind, not through child sacrifices, or the slaughter of captives, or personal piety, of feats of atonement, or ritual practices, or temple prostitution, or opiates, or any other way the world has come up with. This was always God’s plan, for redemption to be through, and only through, one substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood, that according to God, fulfills all the death sentences of the whole household of God. It was announced to Moses, and then entire nation of Israel over fourteen hundred years before Christ was born, and then to us in the Bible. It was believed then and now and counted as righteousness. Is not His plan perfect?

One Savior

After the Passover, the nation of Israel received the law at Mount Sinai, not for salvation but for fellowship with God because of salvation. And the law, the ordinances, the tabernacle instructions, in Exodus, and the instructions about sacrifices and offerings in Leviticus, together caused the nation of Israel to continually keep before them God’s plan of redemption

⁹ Rom 3:23

¹⁰ Ex 14:16

through substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood.¹¹ There were daily sacrifices in the morning and evening to tie His plan to the daily need for redemption.¹² There were national sacrifices for the nation as a whole.¹³ There were sacrifices to redeem first born sons.¹⁴ There were sacrifices to cancel sin and guilt. There were sacrifices to remember the Passover and ordinances to cause one generation to teach the next about all that God had done.¹⁵

Therefore, Jewish life through history has been steeped in this knowledge that one substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood fulfills all the death sentences of the whole household of God. For more than 1,400 years this was the message continually preached through all the animal sacrifices and feast days and holidays. By the time of Jesus, the world was pregnant with expectation that God would provide that one final substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood. So when Jesus approached John the Baptist at the River Jordan, the 1,400 years of waiting came to an end, as John proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" It's Him, Christ the Lord, sinless and perfect,¹⁶ the One Savior.

Is this not perfect? Is this not the best news for perpetrators like us, who now know for certain that God is gracious, since all our sins, Christ covered at the cross; and our death sentence, He fulfilled? Is this not the best news for victims like us, who now know for certain that God cares and is just, since the sins committed against us, Christ did not overlook but rather covered with His death? Do not our hearts burn when we see how willing Christ is to be our sacrificed Passover Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world once and for all? For:

Eph 1:7 – ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

John 5:24 – ²⁴ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Heb 10:18 - ¹⁸ Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

I find it perfect that the redemption story in Exodus and Leviticus closely follows the story of our own salvation in these later days. Our Passover was when we first believed in Christ and placed our faith in His sacrifice for us on the cross. Our release from bondage in Egypt was our release from slavery to sin, being made new persons on the day we first believed. Our Red Sea was the Holy Spirit leading us through great trials of this life by day and by night. Our Mount Sinai was when we began to know God through understanding of the Bible. And our promised land is when Christ takes us home into eternal life with Him. The whole story is about Christ. And it all has to do with His forgiveness of our sins.

¹¹ Lev 17:11

¹² Ex 29:38-46

¹³ Lev 16:7-10

¹⁴ Ex 13:14-16

¹⁵ Ex 12:24-27

¹⁶ 1Pet 1:18-21

One Response

One last thing. If we are in possession of such a great gift of salvation, of God's grace toward us, through Christ's forgiveness of our sins, the redemption through His blood, and the passing out of death into eternal life, and it all has to do with His forgiveness of us, then what should we do in response? I'd like to present just one thing:

Eph 4:32 - ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Well we have come full circle. We've come back to the initial question. What does it take to forgive? What does it cost to forgive someone of the wrongs they have done? What does it mean that in Christ "we have redemption through His blood?" Does it cost blood to forgive sins? Does it cost His blood? What's the connection between forgiveness and blood? If we are to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us, then just what does it take to forgive?

Back to the story of my grandfather in the Philippines. It turns out that nearly all of the unreleased prisoners were in fact killed by the retreating Japanese army. So after the war, there just weren't many civic leaders left, and even some of them the communists were assassinating. So in 1948, my grandfather was among the few appointed to a War Reparations Committee that travelled to Japan to negotiate. In a little known piece of post-war history, the nation of Japan formally asked the Philippine delegation for their forgiveness on behalf of the Philippine nation. My father said my grandfather teared up telling how he forgave Japan. In fact, on his first trip, before there were any reparations, he purchased this bamboo silverware set made by the Mitsubishi Company as a sign to himself of his forgiveness of Japan.

What did it take him to forgive? I don't think he could himself forgive. The sin was too great. The loss was too searing. But I think he relied on the fact that Christ had already forgiven his tormentors and captors, that Christ had already given Himself as the only substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood. I think he relied on Christ who from the cross said, "It is finished," thereby fulfilling every death sentence, even those mandated for his tormentors and captors. And if it was finished for Christ, it was finished for my grandfather. And until his death in 1968, we understand that he ate every meal using one of the spoons from this silverware set.

Church, whatever we must forgive others for, Christ has forgiven us of far more. And when we do not forgive others it is like saying to Christ, "Your death for them is not enough," which means we must also then say, "Your death for me is not enough. But His death on the cross is enough. It is finished. Church, if there is anyone you have not yet forgiven, if there is any bitterness and resentment still in your heart, if there is something too painful to let go, please consider, that if it is finished for Christ, it can also be finished for you.

* * *

What does it take to forgive sin? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.