



Learning to be Holy

Does the ancient book of Leviticus have something to say to 21st Century Christians? Yes indeed, says PHIL CAMPBELL...

Introduction

Sometimes, the Old Testament books that look the hardest can really be the easiest – at least when it comes to leading your listeners to Christ. Leviticus is one of those books that seems so full of arcane rituals and regulations...yet in the end can leave you almost panting in anticipation. It creates a thirst that only Jesus Christ can satisfy. This short series provides a simple overview of the book, and attempts to demonstrate how it “prepares the way” for Christ.

Big Ideas and Benefits

In essence, Leviticus is about what it means to live as the people of God. It’s a life-sized visual aid of our sin, and God’s holiness. Significantly, at every point it is God who provides a way for sin to be covered – Holiness, or set-apartness, is something that God provides for His people, who can’t attain it on their own. Significantly, too, Leviticus is the book that provides essential background for key concepts like “Atonement” and “Priesthood.” In this series of sermons, I made a conscious decision to try to describe these concepts *experientially* rather than define them... in other words, I attempted to paint a word-picture of what something like atonement would “feel like” - bringing your favourite animal, laying your hands on its head, slashing its throat with a knife... an somehow finding God’s forgiveness in the sacrifice of an innocent life. I also worked hard through the series to put the listener into the position of the **ordinary Israelite**, who was served by a High Priest who would “bring his case before God,” who was saved by sacrifices made in his place by a God who had provided a way for his uncleanness to be washed away. Those who are served by Jesus, a greater High Priest, find themselves in the same situation today.



There are always Christians who have a confused understanding of the place of the Old Testament law. Funnily, few advocates of Christian lawkeeping are prepared to be consistent when it comes to Leviticus. They intuitively understand that the cross makes sacrifices obsolete, but don’t follow the logic through. And somehow, when it comes to the jubilee regulations for canceling all debts, even the most ardent law-keeper, while happy to have his own credit card debts overlooked, isn’t so happy about releasing his debtors. All of this makes Leviticus a great book for teaching and demonstrating some of the key “continuity/discontinuity” ideas that are central to Biblical Theology. Moving from Leviticus to Jesus in the areas of sacrifice, cleanliness, atonement and jubilee is easy, and can be grasped by most listeners.

The sermon series was accompanied by a set of Bible Studies, which previewed each talk and developed some key ideas, particularly those relating to method. A fifth study brought the methodology to the foreground, showing how it’s always essential to move down the time line

from the Old Testament to Jesus.

Breakup

The series was designed to provide an overview of Leviticus, and so does not cover every chapter. The first two talks cover a lot of ground, while the last two talks look at single chapters in detail. In a sense, it’s simply an overview of the book rather than a detailed exposition... but that’s probably the depth most congregations will find most comfortable.

Talk 1 – Approach with Caution
Lev 1-10

Talk 2 –The Great Unstainer
Lev 11 to 15

Talk 3 – How to Get Right with God
Lev 16

Talk 4 – Party Time
Lev 25

The full text of these talks is available on the internet at: <http://www.onthenet.com.au/~pressies>

Talk 1 - Leviticus 1-10
Approach with Caution

1. Taking Liberties with God

Have you seen the movie Office Space? It's about a guy who's got such a dead boring job as a computer programmer that he sets out to get himself fired. He can't stand it any more. So it's sort of like he's committing CAREER SUICIDE. Comes in late every day, does absolutely NO WORK AT ALL. And finally, he's called in to be interviewed by the management consultant who's been called in to cut back the workforce. He should be shaking in his boots. But he's not. In he goes to the interview with the guy who holds his future in his hands, and because he's trying to get himself fired, he doesn't care WHAT HE DOES. So he SLOUCHES BACK IN THE CHAIR; he puts his feet up on the table; pours himself a coffee. And when the guy says to him, look, we want to know WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR TIME on a normal working day, he says, "Well, I come in about half an hour late. And then I sit there for about an hour and I just DAYDREAM. Do the same after lunch. He said, I reckon if you add it up I do about FIFTEEN MINUTES PRODUCTIVE WORK A DAY."

And the funny thing about it is, he's just so absolutely BRAZEN. Because he wants to get fired. And nobody's got the gumption to actually DO IT. He's rude to the boss, laughs in his face, drinks his coffee. Everything short of tweaking his nose. And in the end he's got so much front you just have to laugh.

Trouble is, that's exactly how a lot of people want to treat THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE. Over familiarity. Put your feet up. **Which is no laughing matter.**

Late last year in Sydney an old radio star drank himself to death. Ward Austen, famous back in the 60s. A real celebrity back then, a nobody when he died. Friends found him dead in his lounge-room. The TV news the next night had all the tributes to him from his friends. John Laws. Normie Rowe. And another friend, who said this... He said, Right now, there's a party going on in HEAVEN. Because WARD'S up there with HIS MATES. What a party. Ward. And Johnny O'Keefe. And Elvis.

Now I want to ask you to think about that this morning. And the fact that maybe that's a little bit PRESUMPTUOUS. To think that ANYONE can just bowl into the presence of God. And says,

HEY, LET'S PARTY. Where are the guys? Where's the beer? And even to say that... is very much a case of TAKING GOD FOR GRANTED, isn't it.

But Australians do that all the time. If they stop to think about God at all, they're pretty sure God's their mate. Easy going God. No worries. And you can just invent him to suit yourself. You'll say, well, I LIKE TO THINK OF GOD as being... well, whatever you like. And that's the other big catch-cry, isn't it. You can believe whatever you like. But don't go telling ME what YOU think God is like. Because when it comes to God, MY OPINION is just as good as YOUR OPINION.

Now how would you feel if you were watching a couple of people talking about YOU. Who don't even KNOW YOU. And they're deciding for themselves what YOU LIKE. And what you DON'T LIKE. What you FEEL and what you DON'T FEEL. How you like your coffee; without even ASKING YOU. Leviticus is a book that you'll see comes very early in the Old Testament. And it's a book where God turns that sort of thinking on its head. And does exactly the reverse. He says HERE'S WHAT I'M LIKE.

And here's what YOU need to be like... if you're going to approach me. Here's how to wipe your feet at the door, here's how you stand, here's how you sit. Because I AM GOD. Set what YOU'RE LIKE according to what I'm like. Be HOLY.. because I AM HOLY.

2. The History of Israel - where are we up to?

- about to move in to the Promised Land
A brief historical overview from Genesis to now...

Now I don't know if you've ever moved into a new house. But at this point, it's a bit like that. Because Leviticus comes at a point where the removalist truck full of all your stuff is just arriving at the new house and you're ready to move in.

That's what it's like. This huge crowd of Israelites; they're at Mount Sinai, they're about to move in to their new land. And God says to Moses, there are a few things I want to make VERY CLEAR before we go any further. There are a few things you need to know before we MOVE IN. A few things these Israelites need to know. About living in the land I've promised.

And if you turn over a page or two to Leviticus 20 verse 22 to 24, you'll see a

summary. Of what's happening. God says this. He says, What you've got to do, verse 22, *is keep all my decrees and laws. And follow them, so that the land where I'm bringing you to live may not vomit you out. You mustn't live according to the customs of the nations I'm going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them; but I said to you, "you will possess the land; I'll give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God... who has SET YOU APART from the nations."*

3. Approaching God

So how is the way they live, the way they approach God, how is it going to REFLECT THE REALITY... that GOD IS HOLY? That's what we're going to find out. And to do that I want to look with you very quickly at the first 10 chapters. Just touching down quickly on some key issues so we can see what's going on. And why.

- sacrifices

What we're going to be looking at is PROTOCOL. Red tape. The rules and regulations for approaching A HOLY GOD. And if you've tried reading through Leviticus and you've got bogged down in all the repetition and the detail then you've noticed something significant. Which is, for the people of Israel, approaching God was something that they had to do very CAREFULLY. Meticulously. In exactly the way God says. For Jewish children, Leviticus was the very first book of the bible they studied. They had it drilled into their minds. How do you approach a HOLY GOD? You don't just swagger in and say, let's party. You don't just bowl in and put your feet up on the desk. You approach a Holy God on HIS TERMS. Exactly. First of all, chapter 1 to 6, when you come before God you bring an OFFERING. When you come to God, you bring a SACRIFICE.

- flip through chapters 1 to 5 and you'll see them listed... the Burnt Offering (Lev 1), Grain Offering (Lev 2), Fellowship Offering (Lev 3), Sin Offering (Lev 4:2), Guilt Offering (Lev 5:14)

Example: The Burnt offering in detail
So let's go back to chapter 1 and have a closer look at the burnt offering as an example. Look at it from verse 3 in chapter 1. And I want you to try and imagine this is YOU. Try to imagine this is you three thousand years ago. You're an Israelite farmer, you've got your herd of maybe

thirty cattle that mill around your tent at night, mooing. You milk them every morning. And you realise it's time to make an OFFERING TO GOD. So let's see what happens.

Verse 3, you're going to make a burnt offering. And what you've got to do is bring one of your cattle. Not the mangy one. Or the one that's limping a bit. This is bad news, isn't it. You've got to pick YOUR BEST ONE. A male. Without defect. The one you had picked out as the best breeder for next year. The one you least want to part with.

And you bring it to the tent of meeting. To the front flaps of the tent. Where you meet Aaron the high priest. And his sons. And they'll tell you what to do. They'll say PUT YOUR HANDS ON IT'S HEAD. Verse 4. So you do. And as you do it, it's like you're saying to this young bull that you're probably pretty fond of, I'm laying everything I've done wrong, I'm laying all my sin... on YOU. And then they hand you a bronze bladed knife. And you cut its throat. Let me tell you, going to church back then was pretty messy. But it certainly wasn't BORING, was it! Blood spurting everywhere. And Aaron's sons get a bowl full of the blood and they start sprinkling it around the sides of the altar at the front of the tent; there's a browny red splatter pattern all over it from where they've done it before. And you skin your burnt offering and you cut it into pieces, and the priests light the fire on the altar and they carefully wash the different pieces of meat, and arrange them on the fire. And they burn it up.

You choose your best. You bring it. You put your hands on its head. You kill it. You cut it up. They sprinkle the blood; they burn it. And according to verse 4, when you do that, GOD ACCEPTS IT. Have a look at what it says there, because it's a key verse. "He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it WILL BE ACCEPTED ON HIS BEHALF ... to MAKE ATONEMENT FOR HIM." Somehow, bringing your best animal, putting your sins on its head and killing it, somehow it makes atonement for you. Somehow, its life is taking the place of your life. At least in a symbolic way. Which your HOLY GOD says, I WILL ACCEPT.

- priesthood
- ordination (Lev 8)

You can't approach God without a proper priest.

- getting started (Lev 9)

The details of ordination

- the danger of a casual approach to God (Lev 10)

Keep reading at the start of chapter 10. Because here are Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron. Apprentice Priests. And they say, hey, this is pretty good stuff, this priest thing. There's POWER ON TAP. They say, let's TRY SOMETHING ELSE. So they take their censers, their little brass fire bowls; they put some coals in them, and add some incense... and they prance into the tent and swing it around. Let's offer some fire before God. Except they're offering UNAUTHORISED FIRE before the Lord. Contrary to his command. Not how he said to. And so verse 2 says, FIRE CAME OUT FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD... and consumes them. In a flash. And Moses says to Aaron... and I guess he said it in awe... this is what the Lord spoke of when he said, "Among those who approach me I will show myself HOLY... in the sight of the people I WILL BE HONoured."

Don't come to me ON YOUR TERMS. Come to me on MY TERMS. Or else. The thing the Israelites had to learn... and they learned it the hard way... was that the GOD WHO SAVED THEM FROM EGYPT WAS HOLY. And you don't mess with a HOLY GOD. You come to him on HIS TERMS. Or not at all.

4. Leviticus, Jesus and Us

- a once and for all sacrifice by a Perfect High Priest (Heb 7)

Now friends, I wonder if you can start to see what a book like Leviticus has got to say to us. Today. Not ancient Israelites. But 21st century Christians. Because we need to be discerning enough to see that SOME THINGS HAVE CHANGED. And other things haven't.

Did you know... that God is STILL a Holy God.

Did you know... that you STILL can't come to him... except on exactly the terms HE SETS OUT.

Did you know... that you still can't approach God without the right sacrifice. Because you're SINFUL. And God is holy. Your sin needs ATONEMENT. Did you know... that you still can't approach God without A HIGH PRIEST... to go for you. And did you know that the Lord Jesus... has done ALL THAT. Once and for all.

And the only reason we don't still have to do all that stuff, all the ordaining of Holy Priests, all that killing of animals,

the only reason you didn't have to bring your best sheep here in the car with you this morning... is that the SACRIFICE OF JESUS ON THE CROSS... was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. And the job has been done. In a way that never has to be repeated.

- approach with caution

Don't come to me with your own good ideas. Your own best efforts. Your own feeble religions. No matter how good the idea seems at the time. GOD IS HOLY. Which means you come through Jesus as your high priest, with HIS LIFE as your sacrifice... or you don't come at all.

Talk 2 - Leviticus 11-15

The Great Unstainer

1. Lady Macbeth

"Out, Damned Spot!"

If you're anything like me, probably the last time you thought about Shakespeare was in a High School english class. And maybe you didn't even think much of him then. But there's on of his plays with a line in it that's always stuck in my head. It's from Macbeth. A play all about politics. The way they used to do it back in Scotland. And the line I remember comes from Act 5. Scene 1.

Where Lady Macbeth has talked her husband into KILLING THE KING. And he's done it. She's the brains of the operation. And after the murder, she picks up one of the daggers. And gets blood on her hands.

Which from then on, becomes a symbol. A symbol of her guilt.

And by Act 5, Lady Macbeth is cracking up. She's walking in her sleep every night, she's babbling to herself, and they call in the doctor. Who's standing in the corridor watching, as Lady Macbeth tries to wash this invisible stain off her hands. And there's the famous line. She says "OUT DAMNED SPOT! out, I say!" And hour after hour, she stands scrubbing at the sink. And it won't come out. Because the spot's not REALLY ON HER HAND AT ALL. It's on her heart. And she says,

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." And she's right.

Because all the washing in the world won't can't wash off the GUILT of what she's done.

Now this morning, we're looking again at the book of Leviticus. The part of the bible that reminds us most of all about THE

HOLINESS OF GOD.

And I don't know what stains you've got on YOUR LIFE this morning. On YOUR CONSCIENCE. That you can't wash off, no matter how hard you try. But the good news is, as we come to Leviticus, and especially as we see how the regulations of Leviticus have been fulfilled by JESUS... the good news is, that God has provided a way... for every stain of sin to be washed clean.

2. Clean and Unclean (Lev 11-15) Every day of their lives, every move they make, the Israelites are going to be reminded in a symbolic way... of what it means to be CLEAN before a Holy God. - food (ch11)

And on it goes. Land animals. Sea animals. Clean and unclean.

All the way to verse 46 and 47, where it's summed up like this. And follow what it says. These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water and every creature that moves about the ground. YOU MUST DISTINGUISH between the UNCLEAN AND THE CLEAN, between living creatures that may be eaten, and those that MAY NOT BE EATEN.

Every time you go hunting. Every time you decide what's for dinner. That's the question you've got to be asking. CLEAN. Or UNCLEAN.

- childbirth (ch12)
- skin diseases (ch13)
- clothes (13v47)
- walls (14:35)

What happens if you're living in the promised land and you look at the walls of your house... and there's some RISING DAMP. Spreading mildew. Chapter 14 verse 35. Off you go to the priest. And you say, "I've seen something that looks like MILDEW in my house." And you empty out the house. And the priest goes and checks the wall. And declares whether your house is CLEAN. Or UNCLEAN.

3. What does it all mean?

Now the question is, what is it that ties it all together? I mean, it's bad enough just having to READ THIS STUFF. Imagine if you had to LIVE IT. Day after day. Year after year. Learning all the rules for what's CLEAN. And what's NOT. So WHAT'S THE POINT?

It's not about hygiene... but a picture of sin

...the hygiene benefits are just a by-product of something BIGGER.

Because God is setting up a series of SYMBOLS, that are designed to teach the Israelites something that's even bigger

than PERSONAL HYGIENE. And that is, he's teaching them about SIN. And HOLINESS. And almost everything in life came into one of three categories. Either UNCLEAN. CLEAN. Or HOLY.

Your food. The people you mixed with. The clothes you wore. Even YOU. Yourself. And the only thing that stayed absolutely HOLY though all of it was GOD HIMSELF. And the HOLY and the UNCLEAN... can't come into contact. Or the unclean is CONSUMED. And so anything with a spot on it, or a blemish on it – it's exactly the same symbolism as we saw with Lady Macbeth. It becomes a VISIBLE REMINDER OF WHAT SIN IS LIKE. It's not about HYGIENE. It's about visible symbols of HOLINESS. And SIN. Holiness and Uncleaness don't mix. And the whole system is summed up in verse 31 of chapter 15; which says this. Here's the crunch. God says to Moses, here's the big one. This is the key. With all these ways to get unclean, here's what people have got to learn. He says, You must keep the Israelites SEPARATE from things that make them unclean, so they will not DIE IN THEIR UNCLEANNESS for defiling my Holy Place which is among them.

GOD HIMSELF. Is living among the people of Israel. Showing his presence in a glowing presence in their tabernacle. And if anyone brings their UNCLEANNESS into the presence of God... they're DEAD. So if there's ONE LESSON the people of Israel have to learn... it's that HOLINESS and UNCLEANNESS don't mix.

For Israel, there were 96 ways to be reminded about SIN.

4. The Good News

- a sacrifice of atonement can make the unclean clean

But the big thing I want you to notice, is that it's not all BAD NEWS. Because there's some GOOD NEWS AS WELL. It's not all ONE WAY TRAFFIC. Because in these same 5 chapters, there's also the way to GET CLEAN. 37 times. You'll see the word CLEAN. 37 times. We can see the UNCLEAN. Becoming clean again.

In a way Lady Macbeth couldn't. Because God is saying to Israel, when you're reminded about my HOLINESS, when you're reminded about SIN... you need to know, the effects of SIN AND DEATH can be reversed. And the unclean can become CLEAN. And the CLEAN can become HOLY.

And so sometimes it's a ceremonial WASHING. And other times, it's the ritual you see in chapter 14. Verse 19. And I want you to have a look at it. And see

the principle.

Verse 19. Because the priest has to do this. "Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make ATONEMENT for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering, and offer it on the altar together with the grain offering and make atonement for him... and he will be CLEAN.

5. Leviticus, Jesus and Us

- clean on the INSIDE is more important than clean on the OUTSIDE

Now I said last week, and I'll say it again, the thing we've always got to do when we read the Old Testament, is to see how JESUS FULFILLS IT. Before we start applying it to ourselves today.

You know, the Jews were great ones for hanging on to symbols, like the symbols in Leviticus, AND LETTING GO OF THE REALITY. We can do the same. And we often do it especially with our rituals. So that the sacraments grow out of all proportion in our thinking. Even when we've let go of the gospel. And you notice that especially in the sort of churches that have given up on almost everything else, they'll scream blue murder if you try to mess with the Lords Supper. You can preach CHRIST DIDN'T RISE FROM THE DEAD; and that's okay. But you try changing the communion ritual just one little bit – and there's an outcry.

The Israelites got very, very good at playing the game of CLEAN and UNCLEAN. But the problem was, they lost sight of the REAL MEANING of the symbols.

I was reading an article the other day about Jews in Sydney at the moment.

They've had a rule that says on the Sabbath you're not allowed to drive a car more than 800 metres from your home.

Which actually makes it very difficult for Jews in a city the size of Sydney to get to the Synagogue. So what they've done is they've come up with what's called an ERUV. Which means a declaration by a Rabbi, that extends the boundaries of your HOME. And so if there's something like a powerline connected to your home and it goes down the road and connects to another line that runs up the highway, then as long as you stay within 800 metres of the powerlines, you can still drive your car. All the way to the synagogue. That's what Jews love to do. Stick to the letter of the law. And lose the substance. Which is exactly what Jesus said they did with the laws of clean. And unclean.

And you can see that if you turn to Mark chapter 7; and follow through what he says to them. The Pharisees, the strictest

of the Jews in the time of Jesus, they're criticising his disciples. Because they're eating their food without going through all the rituals to become ceremonially clean.

And Jesus lets rip. He says, what you're really doing, you hypocrites, is you're losing sight of the REALITY; and holding on to the traditions of men.

If you're opened at Mark 7, pick it up from verse 14. He says, listen to me everyone; and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him; rather it is what comes OUT OF A MAN that makes him unclean.

And then he leaves the crowd, and goes into the house, and the disciples say to him, WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY THAT? And he says to them, don't you get it? The sort of CLEAN THAT REALLY MATTERS... it's what's in the HEART. He says, Are you so dull – verse 18 – don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart, but into his STOMACH and then out of his body. (And Mark tells us there, in that one simple sentence, Jesus turns the rituals of Leviticus upside down. They've reached their USE BY DATE.) And he goes on. Verse 20. The thing that makes people REALLY UNCLEAN... it what's INSIDE. He says, What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from WITHIN, out of mens hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy – can I ask you as you look at these, HOW UNCLEAN ARE YOU – slander, arrogance and folly. ALL OF THESE, they come from the INSIDE. And make a man UNCLEAN.”

You mightn't have committed murder. Or adultery lately. Maybe you have. But even if you haven't... what about GREED? Any stains there? ENVY? Unclean, unclean, unclean. All from right inside us. Even the best of us. It's all there. How can the UNCLEAN... people like that. People like US. Approach a Holy God? Without being struck down on the spot?

- a sacrifice of atonement for US And the answer is, exactly the same. Only by SACRIFICE. The sacrifice of Jesus, who as he goes from place to place, as you follow through Mark's gospel, time and time again makes the UNCLEAN CLEAN. As he touches people with skin diseases – and instead of becoming unclean, makes them CLEAN. As he touches the DEAD. And brings life. As

he brushes against the woman in the crowd who's been bleeding for 12 years. And again, instead of becoming unclean himself; makes her clean. Because he's on the way to make the once and for all sacrifice – that wipes all the old regulations away. And makes it possible for people who are UNCLEAN ON THE INSIDE... to find forgiveness.

You know, you've got to say as you read all the regulations, all the rules, all the symbols Israel had to live with, it's GREAT we don't have to live with that stuff, isn't it? And when you've got a red sore on your skin, you don't have to go and see your priest and be put out of the camp. You can just go down and see Ken at the Chemist.

But if instead of appreciating our freedom, we end up FORGETTING OUR PROBLEM, then we've missed the point, haven't we. That as sinners, all of us, need cleaning on the inside; or there's no hope at all that we can approach our Holy God. And that as sinners, all of us... need to make sure that we realise that we can only approach God with that sacrifice before us; the sacrifice of the perfect life of our Lord Jesus. Who makes it possible for you to face God with every sin put aside. Every spot wiped clean. Every wrong forgiven.

Talk 3 Leviticus 16 – The Day of Atonement

How to Get Right with God

1. Sometimes, it doesn't seem fair to forgive...

An article from the South China Morning Post two weeks ago, April 29th, had a fascinating story. And one that raises some big questions.

Two reporters say they've tracked down the former head of the Khmer Rouge security service in Cambodia. Who in the 1970s ordered the torture and killing of at least 14000 Cambodian men, women and children.

Not a real surprise. They tracked down Pol Pot, who died a few months back. But here's the catch. The chief of the security service who they've found now, his name's DOOK - and he's been found living in Western Cambodia as a BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN. Which is the bit that made the HEADLINES.

Dook disappeared when the Khmer Rouge fell in 1979 and was presumed dead. But apparently, he'd become a Christian, and was working until late last year with an international aid organisation. Who didn't know who he was. Now

he's 56. And the told the reporters who tracked him down that he was deeply sorry for the killings - and was willing to face an international tribunal. In their report they said it was unusual to find such GENUINE REMORSE.

But let me ask you this morning, if Dook really is a CHRISTIAN, if he really is REMORSEFUL, is that enough? Are you comfortable... sharing heaven with a man who's killed 14,000 people. Including defenseless women and kids. Whose skills as an organiser meant organising MASS EXECUTIONS. I mean, how, why, how can it possibly be fair for a man like that... to be heading for heaven. Forgiven?

And do you reckon a MASS MURDERER like that stands any chance at all of being FORGIVEN BY GOD? Because it's a big ask, isn't it?

Ordinary sinners maybe. Adulterers. Liars. No problem. People like us, we can expect to be forgiven. But if you're a mass killer, FORGET IT. Sorry Dook... you're out of luck. Because somehow, it seems UNFAIR, doesn't it... to say God can FORGIVE someone like that.

Well, this morning that's what we're looking at. The HOW AND WHY of God's forgiveness. How can it be that a sinner ; any sinner... can be put right with God? 2. The How and Why of God's Forgiveness

a) The Day of Atonement (Lev 16) - a lasting ordinance

Do it year after year after year (v30) - atonement means "making up for wrong"

On this day, ATONEMENT WILL BE MADE FOR YOU. To cleanse you " Here's the key to what it's all about... Keep reading verse 30. It says, "Then, before the Lord, you will be CLEAN FROM ALL YOUR SINS." All of them.

That's what ATONEMENT'S ABOUT. It's not a word we use much these days. But when we do use it, TO MAKE ATONEMENT means to MAKE UP FOR SOMETHING YOU'VE DONE WRONG. Not a word you hear very often, but I can actually still remember the last time I heard someone use the word on TV. It was during a footie match, back in the days when Mal Meninga was still playing for Canberra. And as I recall, he was kicking for a conversion. Easy points, right in front of the posts. And the kick was an absolute dud. At a point in the game where Canberra really could have used it. And so Mal was hanging his head in

shame.

And then five minutes later, he intercepts a pass, and he runs like the wind. And scores a beautiful try. At which point RAY WARREN who's the commentator, says, Mal has MADE ATONEMENT for that TERRIBLE KICK. He's made up for it. He's squared the balance. Whatever he's done wrong, it's been PAID FOR.
- atonement is made FOR you, not BY you!

We're going to take some time looking at HOW THAT HAPPENS in a moment; but before we do that can I just point out a very important point. That makes this very different to Mal Meninga's try. And also makes it very different to how Jews today see the DAY OF ATONEMENT. And that's those three little words in verse 30 we just brushed over. This is the day if you're an Israelite, where Atonement is MADE FOR YOU. And as we look through the rest of the chapter I want you to keep that in mind. That we're not looking at a way the Israelites ATONED FOR THEMSELVES. Somehow made up for their own wrongs. It's not like you stuff up a kick so you've got to score a try. It's not what the Jews say today. Which if you worked through the study during the week, you would have seen... they think that by wearing canvas shoes instead of leather shoes; by going without washing; by being hard on themselves for a day, they can ATONE FOR THEMSELVES. And they've missed the whole point. God's way of doing things, you don't get to ATONE FOR YOURSELF. You don't get to score the winning points at all. You don't somehow climb back into his good books; you don't make up for being bad by being good. The thing we're going to see is in God's way of doing things, atonement is made FOR YOU. And not BY YOU. It's an important point to notice.

3. The Day of Atonement in Summary (v1-10)

- sacrifices... through the curtain
A description of the tent – Aaron is NOT TO COME THROUGH THE CURTAIN whenever he pleases.

We've seen over the last few weeks, haven't we; how God is showing the people of Israel that HE IS HOLY. How he's showing them with the system of clean and unclean things that the UNCLEANNESS OF SIN... can't come into contact with the HOLINESS OF GOD. And Aaron has to remember that. Except in verse 3, God says, THERE IS A WAY to come through the curtain. Don't

come through the curtain or you'll die. Except if you do it this way. This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area. And only this way. With a YOUNG BULL for a sin offering. And a ram for a burnt offering.

4. The Day of Atonement in Detail (v11f)

Now from verse 11 we get the instructions in detail. And what I want you to do as we read it is to imagine... not to image that you're the high priest. But that you're an ordinary Israelite. Having ATONEMENT MADE FOR YOU. As all this is going on, on your behalf. For YOU. You're watching from outside the tent. Standing in the hot sun with all the rest of the Israelites. And Aaron your high priest brings the bull. An offering for his OWN SIN. Because everyone knows, even though he's the high priest – he's SINFUL. Just like everyone else. And he kills it. With a knife in the throat. To make atonement from himself and his household.

And then there's a hush. As verse 12 says he takes a censer full of burning coals and puts in two handfuls of finely ground incense. And you can smell the sweet smell of the smoke. And he steps forward. And in one hand he's got some blood from the bull on his fingers. The other hand, the incense; and you're holding your breath as he steps through the forbidden curtain. Into the Most Holy Place. The verse 13 says the smoke from the incense hides the ATONEMENT COVER; the lid of the box with the commandments in it. And because the smoke from the incense hides the atonement cover, he's safe. While with his finger, verse 14 says he sprinkles the blood from the bull.

And then he's out again. And everyone heaves a sigh of relief. Then verse 15, it says he takes the goat that's chosen to be killed. And he slaughters it as the sin offering for the people. For you. And he does the same thing again. Behind the curtain. And sprinkles the blood of the sacrifice on the atonement cover, and in front of it. Which verse 16 says is making atonement for the Most Holy Place, because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, WHATEVER THEIR SINS HAVE BEEN. Their sin, it's like it pollutes everything they come near. And so atonement is made for the holy place. And the Tent of meeting as well. And everyone has to stand back, stay outside, while Aaron makes atonement for himself, for his household, and for the whole

community. Then the same again for the altar outside. Verse 18 and 19. Consecrated – from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

5. Atonement, Jesus and Us
- the curtain torn open
- how big is your CROSS?

Turn over with me to Hebrews chapter 9; a great chapter that picks up the whole idea of the Day of Atonement, and talks about how Jesus has perfectly fulfilled it. And it goes through everything we've just seen. The layout of the tabernacle; the first room with the lampstand; the MOST HOLY PLACE. And verse 6 in Hebrews 9 says when everything was arranged just right, the priests would come into the outside room; but ONLY THE HIGH PRIEST entered the INNER ROOM. And only once a year. And never without blood. Just like we saw .

But when CHRIST CAME - pick it up in verse 11 – he went through a greater tabernacle. He didn't just do it symbolically – he did it for REAL. And verse 12 says, he didn't enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place ONCE FOR ALL... by his OWN BLOOD, having obtained ETERNAL REDEMPTION.

Verse 13 – keep reading. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they're OUTWARDLY CLEAN. But this is something better. And it's the answer to the question we started with. What sort of things in YOUR LIFE can God forgive? How much is he prepared to WIPE AWAY? I mean, what if you're a mass murderer, and you want to ask GOD'S FORGIVENESS? How can he forgive THAT?

Well, here's how. Verse 14. How much MORE... how much more then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered HIMSELF... UNBLEMISHED to God... cleanse OUR CONSCIENCE from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.

Will you get this right. Because not many people have. FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE. For whatever you've done. And it's not through somehow ATONING FOR YOURSELF, being hard on yourself, punishing yourself. FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE... in a way that's pretty much the same as it was for an ordinary Israelite. Except much better. And that is, come to your High Priest. JESUS. And stand back while he makes the PERFECT SACRIFICE on your behalf. His own life. A sacrifice that takes YOUR SIN on himself. And pays for it. And wipes it clean. Whoever

you are, it's available. Whatever you've done. It's FREE. And you can walk out of here today with your conscience absolutely clean and clear. ATONED FOR. On that once and for all Day of Atonement on a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. As the Son of God did all that for you. Which means we need to put aside any ideas you've got that we can somehow EVEN UP THE SCORE with God on our own. Pay our own way in. Put aside any idea too, that there's any sort of RITUAL that we need: any sort of mass, any sort of priest. Because all of that's finished. Completed. By the PERFECT PRIEST. With the PERFECT SACRIFICE. And doesn't need doing again.

What you DO NEED TO DO... whether you're a mass killer or just a plain old ordinary person... is TURN TO JESUS. And trust him. As the one who has opened the way to our Holy God FOR YOU. See, if you have trouble coming to terms with the fact that a man like DOOK can be forgiven by God, let me ask you, HOW BIG IS YOUR CROSS? Dook's crimes are huge. Yours might be too. And to make atonement for huge crimes takes a huge sacrifice. Not a sheep. Not even 2 sheep. Or two hundred sheep. But the perfect life of the perfect man. The perfect SON OF GOD. The perfect priest. The perfect sacrifice. Given for Dook. The mass killer who turned to Jesus. Given for YOU. On that FINAL DAY OF ATONEMENT... when atonement wasn't made BY YOU. But FOR YOU. Once and for all.

Talk 4 Leviticus 25

The Year of Jubilee – Party Time!

1. Horror Stories

- it should be better than this!

Let me start this morning with a couple of horror stories. Number 1. Don was an elder in his church. One of the key church leaders; and Don had a disagreement with a customer in his metalworking business. Over an unpaid bill. So Don threatened to SUE him. And took him to court. The customer was a fellow member of the same church. A Christian brother. Who Don was expected to CARE FOR and ENCOURAGE – as part of his duty as an elder. Instead of that, they're in litigation. Over money.

I could repeat the same story a number of times. A young carpenter; Steve; just a new Christian, finding his feet in the church. Specializes in small home renovations. He's just finished renovating a kitchen for a fellow church member; and when the job's done, the fellow church

member REFUSES TO PAY. He says, if you want your money, you'll have to take me to court.

Somehow, that sort of thing just doesn't seem right, does it? I mean, you expect to get ripped off by some people; there's that old saying, LET THE BUYER BEWARE. There are sharks everywhere. But when it comes to the FAMILY OF GOD, when it comes to our dealings with one another as Christian brothers and sisters, maybe you feel things ought to be different to that. That we ought to treat one another BETTER THAN THAT. If you feel that way, YOU'RE RIGHT.

And yet if you're in business maybe you'll just laugh. And say, don't be IDEALISTIC. Business is business. It's a dog eat dog world out there, so you've got to be tough. And it doesn't matter WHO you're dealing with... debts are debts. Bills are bills. Profits are profits. Well, when you have a look at the way God sets things up for the people of Israel, it's an incredible system, isn't it. The chapter I just read in Leviticus.

2. Setting the Scene

- land rights at the edge of the promised land

And again, I just want to take a couple of minutes to set the scene. To see where we are in the bible. The situation this chapter is talking to.

If you've been here the last few weeks you might remember; we're right at the start of the history of the people of Israel. God's people. Who at the moment are a bunch of bronze age herdsmen who have been SLAVES in the land of Egypt. The people we're looking at here are just a few generations down from the Pyramid builders. And in an incredible set of circumstances that you can read about in the book of Exodus, GOD HAS BROUGHT THEM UP OUT OF EGYPT, he's rescued them from slavery. And he's leading them to their new home.

And here they are on the edge of their new land. As God spells out the ground rules for how things are going to be. Land rights policy, for life in their new land.

- being different

Mabo, Graziers driven off their properties, profiteering real estate speculators... this is a chapter full of laws and rules for Israel that are designed to guarantee that NONE OF THOSE THINGS HAPPEN. Because the land of Israel, it's going to be different. Because these Israelites... are the people of God. That's

the theory. And you can see it in summary if you have a look at verse 14. And verse 17. First of all verse 14. If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIM. And verse 17. Same words. DO NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EACH OTHER. But fear your God. I am the Lord your God.

Everyone else in the world is ripping each other off. You Israelites be different. Because you're the people of God.

3. Sabbath years and the JUBILEE...

Now before you can really appreciate this, you've got to imagine you're one of those people who's got yourself in a real jam. Debts up to your eyeballs. I knew a guy once, he got so much in debt on his bankcard, he had to get another bankcard to pay it off. This is serious. And in the end it just got worse and worse. Paying interest on his interest on his interest. And it happens. You can get to a point where you're just so financially overloaded that it's the end of the line. And like I said before, if you're on the family farm, you just have to walk off. Leave it all behind. Which is devastating. Back in Israel, it could get worse. Because if you really got to the bottom of the barrel, you'd even have to SELL YOUR SELF. And become a slave. That's what they did back then. So just in your mind for a minute, if you've got any debts, double them. Triple them. Bump them up to the point where there's no way in the world you can afford to pay them back. And then imagine you're hearing the trumpet blowing all around Israel. To announce the year of Jubilee.

a) The family farm... back again!

Verse 13. In this Year of Jubilee, everyone is to RETURN TO HIS OWN PROPERTY.

The family farm, it's yours again.

b) from slavery... to freedom

Follow what it says. If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and SELLS HIMSELF TO YOU, don't make him work as a slave. Treat him like a HIRED WORKER. With dignity. And it says in verse 40, he'll work for you... until the YEAR OF JUBILEE.

Here's this guy, see - pretend it's YOU - your debts have multiplied and piled up so high around your ears that you say, there's nothing else I can do. Except sell myself as a slave. And aren't you glad that God says to your fellow Israelites, don't you dare take advantage of a fellow Israelite at a time like that. Pick him up from the dirt. Dust him off. And say,

you're not my slave – you're a hired worker.

And so you're counting down the years. It's a **ONCE IN A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE**. Because the year of Jubilee comes... wouldn't you be hanging out for it... and verse 41 says, you, and your children, you're released. Set free to go back to your own clan and to the property of your forefathers. A clean slate. How would you feel?

Verse 54, there have been all these ways you can buy your freedom, all these ways you can be redeemed. But even if you're not redeemed in any of these ways, you and your children are **RELEASED**... in the year of Jubilee.

4. Why?

Because you're serving a Saving God Why do you look after the poor in Israel? Why not charge interest, make a buck out of his bad luck? Verse 38. Because of the way God treated **YOU**. These Israelites, see, don't forget, they were **SLAVES BACK IN EGYPT**. God's making a nation out of a bunch of former slave labourers. Who he's rescued. So remember. **Verse 38**. I and the **LORD YOUR GOD** who brought you out of Egypt to **GIVE YOU THE LAND OF CANAAN**. Remember **WHO YOU ARE**. Remember **WHAT I'VE DONE FOR YOU**. I've done that... to be **YOUR GOD**.

So let it guide you in the way you treat one another.

Verse 42 – Because you Israelites, you're **MY SERVANTS WHO I BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT**. So don't go making **MY SERVANT... YOUR SERVANT**.

Same thing in verse 54 and 55. If you've hit rock bottom, you've sold yourself as a slave to a foreigner... even if you're not redeemed any other way, you'll be set free in the year of Jubilee, because... verse 55.. because the Israelites belong to **ME** as servants. They are **MY SERVANTS**... who I brought out of Egypt. **I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD**.

5. Jubilee, Jesus and us...

Now how do you like the sound of that? I guess it depends what side of the ledger you're on, doesn't it? How do you like the sound of **DEBTS BEING FORGIVEN**? Of people being let off the hook in a way they don't really deserve? Depends on whether you reckon you've got a credit balance. Or you know you're in debt.

See, the point is, every 50 years Israel was meant to be reminded that they serve a **JUBILEE GOD**. A God of forgive-

ness. A God of **NEW STARTS**. And that was meant to remind them... how they're meant to treat **ONE ANOTHER**. Jesus – our Jubilee **GOD IS STILL A JUBILEE GOD**. A God of **NEW STARTS**. And that's what I want to reinforce most this morning. I mean, imagine right here, right now, I could just say, whatever it is on your mastercard bill for the month, whatever you've booked up on your St George VisaCard... it's **CANCELLED**. Tear up your bill. It's **PAID FOR**.

Well, I can't say it for your credit card. But I **CAN** say it when it comes to your account with God. That the **JUBILEE GOD** has actually **PAID YOUR BILLS FOR YOU**. At the cost of the life of his Son on the Cross.

If you've been forgiven, forgive. Ephesians 4. Verse 32. And if you haven't found it, you'll see it on your service sheet. Look for the words **JUST AS**. They're the key. Because we're called to be **JUST AS HE WAS**.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, **just as** in Christ, God forgave you. Be **IMITATORS OF GOD**, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love... **just as** Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Get that? Look at how **GOD TREATED YOU**. And spread it around. Imitate. Forgive each other. Like God forgave you. Live a life of Love. Like Jesus loved us. Give yourself up for each other. Just as Christ gave himself up... for us. Look at him, and do it. Look at him, and do it.

If you were an Israelite, it meant **CANCELLING DEBTS**. Literal debts. And caring for your fellow Israelites. For us as Christians, it might mean the same. It might mean simply **FORGIVING EACH OTHER**. For the wrongs we do. For the way we so easily offend one another, do the wrong thing, say the wrong thing.

You know, it's so **HARD** to forgive, isn't it. And the longer I've been around, the more I see how hard it is. To let go of hurts. To **CANCEL DEBTS** you've got chalked up; when you've been offended, when you've been hurt by someone, it's so hard to let it go. Hard for God, as well. It cost him the life of his Son. Who was like the lightning rod for the Father's anger at sin. Costly. But can you do that... as forgiven people... first of all,

accept God's jubilee. His forgiveness of you. And then extend it to one another. In a sense, the trumpet blew once and for all when Jesus came and died. So we need to say, **I FORGIVE YOU**. Like God forgave me. I love you. Like Jesus loves me. I cancel your debt. Like he cancelled

Phil Campbell ministers at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church in Queensland, Australia.