

# GARBAGE DAY

LEVITICUS 16:1-34

**SINCE JESUS DIED TO MAKE US HOLY; IT IS OUR DUTY TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.**

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# Garbage Day

Leviticus 16:1-34

I'm sure that I should have been more aware of this. I'm sure I must have studied these things in theology, especially in my studies through Old Testament theology, but I have never seen this concept before. In our push towards holy living, in our battle against sin and the flesh, this concept should provide us with extra-added motivation. This morning we are studying through God's instructions to the Hebrews as to how Yom Kippur should be celebrated. It hit me for the first time that a major portion of the holy day is to purge the uncleanness from the tabernacle. The tabernacle is where God chose to meet His people. His Shekinah Glory resided in the tent. The underlying fact for the ceremony is that the sins and uncleanness of the people had somehow polluted God's house. I don't think that I have ever thought about that before.

As believers, I need to remind us that God the Holy Spirit lives in us. Each individual Christian is the tabernacle of God. My body, my mind, my heart, soul, and every member of my being are parts of God the Holy Spirit's personal space. And further, as we are called out of the world and gathered together under the headship of Jesus, we become part of a larger tabernacle that becomes the dwelling place of God.

When we sin, we pollute God's personal living space. It's as if God the Holy Spirit is living comfortably in us. Every time we sin, it's like we are throwing garbage on the floor in His space. I'm going to talk about this later.

But for now, I'd like us to think of Yom Kippur, not only as a day of personal repentance for the Israelites, but a cleaning day for them. Where I live, we used to have a couple of days each year know as garbage day or trash pickup day. On these days, people would clean out all the garbage from their houses, attics, basements, and garages. We would haul all our trash out of the house and pile it all up on the parkway. Then the city would come with big dump trucks and garbage trucks, and haul it all away. It was a chance to clean up all the garbage that was cluttering up the house.

But even so, it's hard for some people to get rid of garbage. Either they are packrats, afraid they may need some of the stuff at a later date, or are just plain too sentimental to get rid of it.

That reminds me. All of you who know me well know that when an opportunity presents itself for me to get rid of garbage, anything that has not been used in the last year, anything that is broken, and pretty much anything that is not nailed down is going in the garbage.

At one of the churches I served ... I'm not saying which one ... I got tired of looking at all the clutter. I determined that the church would have a clean up day. I had one deacon who just hated to do any extra work. I decided to go visit him at work and personally notify him of the cleaning day. I thought I was going to catch him by surprise, but he was definitely a lot smarter than I. After I informed him of the clean-up day, he motioned to me and went into his boss' office. He said, "Boss, the Reverend here has notified that we're doing some heavy cleaning at the church tomorrow. He needs me to help take out the garbage and to help carry some heavy stuff out of the attic and basement out to the dumpster. Do you think I can get a day off tomorrow?"

His boss replied, "You know we're short-handed. I can't give you the day off."

The deacon looked at me as if he were truly disappointed and said, "I'm sorry Pastor. I'd like to help, I really would. But you heard my boss." As we left the office and as he was closing the door, I saw him look back at his boss and I heard him say, "Thanks boss. I knew I could count on you."

The deacon denies the story to this day. But the truth is that God expects us to clean up the garbage in our individual lives and in the life of the church. If we could see how we dirty God's personal living space, we may be more motivated to get rid of sin. I feel as if I have learned so

much from this passage that I could preach 10 sermons on it. However, I'll resist the temptation and preach just one.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **SINCE JESUS DIED TO MAKE US HOLY; IT IS OUR DUTY TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.**

Before we became Christians, we were filthy, dirty, dead in our sins, and alienated from God. We were so polluted with sin that God could never live in us. But by coming to Him in faith and allowing Him to apply the blood of Jesus to our pathetic lives, He cleaned us up, came into our lives, and set up house. What an incredible gift to have God live in us. We are His house, His dwelling place, His personal tabernacle. It is up to us to keep His space clean and habitable.

## **I. PREPARING FOR HAZZARDOUS DUTY (VS 1-5)**

***Since God Is Absolutely Holy And Just, We Need To Think About How He Responds To Our Attitudes Towards Our Sin.***

Sin is toxic garbage. Verses 1-5 remind us that since the garbage is in such a holy place, we must be prepared for hazardous duty. In other words, **SINCE GOD IS ABSOLUTELY HOLY AND JUST, WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT HOW HE RESPONDS TO OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUR SIN.** Let me put the question to us like this. Are we so grateful to God that He saved us and lives in us, that we are absolutely committed to getting all the sin out of our lives?

### **A. UNDERSTANDING THE DANGER (1-3a)**

Verse 1 through the first half of verse 3 helps us to understand the danger. Back in chapter 10, God made it very clear that He would not tolerate anyone into His presence that wasn't serious about loving Him through obedience. Back in chapter 10 God killed Nadab and Abihu right on the spot in the tabernacle for polluting His space with strange incense. Many so-called scholars say that chapter 16 should follow right after chapter 10, but again, that's just because they want to discredit the authenticity of the Bible.

Think about it this way. In chapter 10, God killed Nadab and Abihu for polluting His space. Chapters 11-15 went into great detail as to how people could become unclean and this chapter informs us that because of carelessness, ignorance, or lack of integrity, sin and impurity has been transmitted throughout the camp, and has even reached and infected God's personal space. This is a perfect place for this chapter.

Think about this. Let's say that I had an infected sore on my back that rendered me unclean. Because I was afraid to show myself to the priest, have him declare me unclean, and send me out of the camp until the sore healed, I did not tell anyone. Every person I come in contact with and touch becomes unclean, even though they wouldn't know it. Now let's say someone wanted to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle. When the person touched the sacrificial animal, the animal becomes unclean. When the priest touches the animal he becomes unclean. When he splashes the blood on the altar, the altar becomes unclean, and when the priest goes into the tabernacle, the tabernacle becomes unclean. I have spread my uncleanness throughout the camp, infected several people who have infected others, and the uncleanness has reached all the way to the very personal space of God.

Keep in mind the uncleanness may be a result of sin or a natural act. For example, we said that if a shopkeeper and his wife had sex, and then opened their shop and did business, everyone they came in contact with became unclean. God now informs Moses of the situation and provides the remedy for it. Every year, once a year on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, a ceremony would be

provided to cleanse the temple, the camp, and the people. It was to be a day of atonement. The precise definition of the word in Hebrew is not known.

The word in Hebrew is *kaphar*. The word can mean to cover in the sense of covering a debt. It can mean to purge or to clean up. It can mean to reconcile or pacify. I think we can see in today's passage where it means all of these. It means cleaning up the tabernacle, the camp, and the personal lives of the Hebrews. They would clean up God's space and God would forgive them of their sins.

The Day of Atonement is a holiday much like our Easter. Before the Day of Atonement people would fast, reflect on their sins, and repent. That part of the holiday is like our Good Friday. We take time during Lent to fast, pray, and repent. When the High Priest came out of the tabernacle alive, the people would cheer and know they were reconciled with God for one more year. On Easter Sunday we celebrate that we have been brought into a right relationship with God and remain in a right relationship with Him based on the death, resurrection, and priesthood of Jesus. Just as a quick aside, it would be good for anyone studying through Leviticus to go back and read through the New Testament book of Hebrews for your personal devotional time. You will be surprised how both Leviticus and Hebrews come alive in new ways.

This holiday is still known to the Jews as *Yom Kippur*, The Day of Atonement. I would like to make some observations at this point. This is like a spiritual housekeeping day. It was a day for them to remove all the spiritual garbage out of God's house, their houses, the camp, and their individual lives.

You remember when we studied through the procedure for removing mould from stone houses. The owner would have to try and clean up the mould. If it grew back, the owner would have to take that stone out of the wall, outside of the camp, and pulverize it. The Apostle Peter describes us as stones in God's temple. God lives in us. If there is mould on us, God will try to clean it up. If we continue to pollute ourselves with sin, God may decide to pack up His things and move out. And further, He will remove us from the church as a whole, and replace us with a clean stone. That should be frightening and give us cause to think and repent.

The second comment I would like to make here is something that I have tried to correct all my years in the ministry. I always hear people say that in the Old Testament people were saved by works. In the New Testament people are saved by faith. That is the most horrible and dangerous theology that I have ever heard. If you were to go back and read the account of the first Passover event, the story makes it clear that there was nothing different in moral character between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. God saved them by grace through faith. The Hebrews didn't deserve to be saved. They were instructed to apply blood to the doorposts of their houses. In faith, everyone who put that blood there was saved. We are no better than the world around us. God simply said that if we will apply the blood of Jesus to our lives we will be saved.

In the ceremony described in this chapter, it is only by grace that God didn't wipe them out for polluting His space. By grace He provided this ceremony by which they could be reconciled with Him.

God has made us holy by the blood of Jesus but He at the same time commands us to be holy. We are required to pursue holiness.

## **B. PREPARING THE SURVIVAL KIT (3b & 5)**

The second half of verse 3 and verse 5 describe Aaron preparing the survival kit. If Aaron or anyone else presumed to enter the Holy of Holies on their own merit, they would die instantly. He gathers together a young bull, two rams, and two male goats. These are the animals God commanded Moses to bring for Sin Offerings and Burnt Offerings. There was no substitute allowed. God commanded the exact animals to be sacrificed and He laid out the entire procedure. God has given us the Scriptures and teachers to prepare us to fight sin. He has given us

salvation, truth, and the Holy Spirit. God equips us and enables us to fight sin but He expects us, no commands us, to fight. We cannot sit back and expect God to fight for us.

### **C. THE RIGHT FRAME OF MIND (4)**

It seems that one very important point we overlook in our walk with God is being in the right frame of mind. Aaron was the spiritual leader of Israel. He wore bright colored and ornate clothing. He would be easily identified as he walked through the camp. For this ceremony, the High Priest was required to change in plain and simple clothes. He would take off his priestly garments, bathe, and change into these clothes that resembled a slave's clothes.

The clear idea that comes through is that if one wants to approach God, he or she must lay everything aside in humility. I know I have said this a thousand times. But all of us should realize that we are nothing, we deserve nothing, and we are not good in any way apart from the righteousness of Christ. I can't speak historically or even before my time. But I'm amazed at how our culture puts in everyone's head how good we are, how noble we are, and how smart we are. There is no way a person can approach God without first dropping all pretense of goodness.

Secondly, I'm stunned at how people think they are intelligent and competent in all areas of life. I try not to tell people I'm a pastor at parties. I hear people spout off stuff about theology that is so far-fetched that it really is unbelievable. What fascinates me is how positive they sound and how authoritative they sound. I don't even bother talking to these people or engaging them. They already know it all. And all of you who really know me know this about me. If I don't know something, or if I have not researched or studied a topic, rather than even giving an opinion, I'd rather say, "I don't know."

This drives my wife crazy. She'll ask me a question about something I'm not sure of, and I'll respond, "I really don't know." Then she will say, "You're a doctor. You should know." The other thing about me is this. When I have read, studied, and am sure of what I'm telling someone and they don't want to listen, I won't pursue it. My feeling is that if they think they know better, I let them go. I'm not about to waste time trying to convince them or argue with them.

Our culture has tried to make everyone feel as if they are expert in every field. If we continue to teach people that they are good, whatever they believe or do is just as good as anyone else, and if we teach them they are smart, then we are preparing people to serve Anti-Christ, not Jesus Christ. There is no way to come safely into the presence of God without humility. The Bible often states this concept, "God gives grace to the humble, but He opposes the proud."

The church has preached a defective gospel because we have preached a defective God. We want God to be powerful enough to do what we ask Him to do, but we don't want to think of Him as dangerous. If God is not dangerous, then He is impotent to do what we want Him to do. On the other hand, if God is holy and dangerous, then He is powerful enough to do not only what we ask, but more than we can even think or imagine.

The Hebrews tied bells and a rope on the High Priest's ankle when he entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for Israel's sins on The Day of Atonement. They knew how dangerous it was. If the bells stopped jingling, that indicated God did not accept the sacrifice and He killed the priest. Since they were not allowed to go in, they would pull the dead priest out of the tabernacle by the rope. It took a dangerous and powerful God to deliver the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt and to bring them safely into the Promised Land. Unfortunately many of them found out how dangerous and powerful He was when they rebelled and He killed them all on the spot.

Is your idea of God that He is some grandfather figure, waiting for you to just jump up on His lap and accept anything you do? Let me just tell you to read and study your Bible more. God is dangerous and He is powerful. **SINCE GOD IS ABSOLUTELY HOLY AND JUST, WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT HOW HE RESPONDS TO OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUR SIN.**

As we leave this section, I just want to point out the comparisons between Christ and all parts of this ceremony. I'm just going to mention some of them. Just as the High Priest took off his priestly garments and put on slave clothes, Jesus took off His divine privileges and came to earth as a lowly human being. Jesus becomes the sacrifice that takes away our sin and our uncleanness. One huge contrast is that the High Priest had to make sacrifices for his own personal sin. Jesus didn't have to offer any sacrifices on His own behalf. He was and is perfect. *Yom Kippur* had to be celebrated and is still celebrated once a year. The sacrifice of Jesus was done once for all time. It is finished.

Now back to our text. Verses 6-22 describe the procedures for handling hazardous material.

## **II. HANDLING HAZZARDOUS MATERIAL (VS 6-22)**

### ***God Lives In Us. Every Sin We Commit Pollutes God's Personal Space.***

I feel it necessary to emphasize this point one more time. **GOD LIVES IN US. EVERY SIN WE COMMIT POLLUTES GOD'S PERSONAL SPACE.**

#### **A. DOUBLE CHECKING THE EQUIPMENT (6-10)**

In verses 6-10 we observe Aaron double-checking the equipment. Again, he prepares all the animals for sacrifice. One bull will be offered up for his sins and the sins of his family, presumably that includes all the priests and their families. This sacrifice will be to take the guilt away for the sins of the High Priest and his family. The ram that will be offered up will be a sign of his dedication and his family's dedication to live holy lives from that point on.

Next he brings the two goats forward. At this point, he cast lots. The first lot falls on the goat dedicated to the LORD. Now please follow along in your texts because this gets a little confusing. This first goat belongs to Jehovah. It will be sacrificed. Now look at verse 10. It says this goat will be presented as a scapegoat and led out to the wilderness. I understand why the translators did this, but it doesn't give us the idea of the literal translation. Literally the text reads for the first goat as being "to or for" Jehovah. The second reads "to or for" *Azazel*. It is misleading to translate it the way the NIV did.

You see if the first goat is to Jehovah, then the second goat has to be to or for a person or a location. Literally *Azazel* comes from two words; *az*, which means goat, and *azel*, which means to go away, to be used up or exhausted. The goat is destined for the wilderness. In the Bible, the wilderness is usually a place of desolation, danger, chaos, a place out of the presence of God. Keep in mind at the time of this first celebration the Israelites are in the wilderness per se. However, they are in the wilderness with God visibly manifest in the pillar of cloud and fire. The wilderness was a place where demons roamed. Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. In other Hebrew literature, there is actually a demon named *Azazel* who was the demon of the wilderness.

It is important to note that this goat is not going to be sacrificed to the demon or Satan. It is merely headed in the direction of the wilderness, the danger, the chaos, and the alienation from God. I think that the Goat for God will be sacrificed for our sin and for our cleansing. The goat for *Azazel* will carry away the alienation that comes from being in sin. I'll explain as the ceremony goes on. But for now remember that when we sin, we alienate ourselves from God and from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### **B. REMOVING GARBAGE FROM GOD'S PERSONAL SPACE (11-17)**

In verses 11-17 we see the High Priest removing the garbage from God's personal space. Aaron slaughtered the bull, and caught the blood. At this point, he fired up the censer with burning coals from the altar, added two handfuls of incense and placed them behind the curtain that separated the tabernacle into two areas, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. The cover of the Ark was designed with two angels who were kneeling and their wings touching. The space above the Ark was known as The Mercy Seat, where God met Israel. Aaron was required to smoke up this room so he would not accidentally see God and die.

After the Holy of Holies was smoked up, Aaron carried in the blood from his sin offering, dipped his finger in the blood, and sprinkled some drops of blood on the front of the cover. Then he sprinkled blood 7 times before the Ark. Next, he slaughtered the goat designated for God. He took the blood inside the Holy of Holies and did the same with the people's offering. He sprinkled blood on the front of the cover. Then he sprinkled blood 7 times in front of the cover. As we look at verse 16 we gain some insight into what atonement means. Aaron was cleaning up, wiping up the uncleanness, the sin, and the rebellion of the community. It was removing all this filth from God's space.

### **C. REMOVING GARBAGE FROM GOD'S FAMILY ROOM (18-19)**

In verses 18-19 we see Aaron removing the garbage from God's family room. Aaron had purified the whole tabernacle. Now he came out of the tent and applied blood to the horns of the altar where sacrifices were burned up. He took some of the blood from his sacrifice and some of the blood from the people's sacrifice. Then he sprinkled the altar 7 times with blood to cleanse it and purify it. So at this point, the sacrifices have been to remove the guilt and the pollution of sin away from God's place and freeing the people from the guilt and penalty of sin.

### **D. REMOVING GARBAGE FROM GOD'S CITY (20-22)**

Next, in verses 20-22, the garbage is removed from God's city. I'm sure you remember the ceremonies that involved two birds, the first bird was killed as a sacrifice, and the second bird was set free to fly away. What happens here is in no way to be connected with that ceremony. What happens here is horrific. Sin brings alienation and death. We know that Satan and his demons come to steal, kill, and destroy. Aaron now takes the second goat, lays both hands on it, and confesses all the wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people, including himself, and transfers all the dirt, filth, harm, and alienation on to this goat. A man leads the goat out of the tabernacle area, out of the camp, and out of the immediate area. He leads the goat out to the wilderness and he releases it to wander around for life.

We should all die like the first goat for our sins. And like the second goat, we deserve to be banished from God's presence forever. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says about Jesus;

*"<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 / NIV).*

And think about the alienation when Jesus cried out on the cross;

*"<sup>45</sup>From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup>About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45-46 / NIV).*

Jesus bore the punishment, the guilt, and the alienation we deserve for each one of us. I can't speak for anyone else, but as for me, as we have studied through this book of Leviticus, I am

coming to see the damage sin causes in my life. I am seeing more and more what Jesus died for and I am coming to an understanding of how destructive my sin is. I am gaining more and more resolve to get rid of it in my life. Jesus died to put my sin and all its effects as far from me as the east is from the west. I should be resolved and fight to keep sin as far away from me as the east is from the west. I have come to understand this.

**GOD LIVES IN US. EVERY SIN WE COMMIT POLLUTES GOD'S PERSONAL SPACE.**

### **III. DISPOSING OF HAZZARDOUS MATERIAL (VS 23-34)**

***God Has Always Saved His People By Grace Through Faith. And He Has Always Commanded His People To Live Pure And Holy Lives. Our Commitment To Living Holy Demonstrates The Authenticity Of Our Faith.***

Verses 23-34 describe the disposing of hazardous material. It is important that we grasp this truth. **GOD HAS ALWAYS SAVED HIS PEOPLE BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH. AND HE HAS ALWAYS COMMANDED HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE PURE AND HOLY LIVES. OUR COMMITMENT TO LIVING HOLY DEMONSTRATES THE AUTHENTICITY OF OUR FAITH.**

#### **A. RETURNING BACK TO A CLEAN LIFE (23-25)**

The end of this ceremony is very graphic as well. Verses 23-25 picture how after true repentance and confession, we can return to a clean life. After the ceremony is complete and the goat has been led out of the camp, Aaron went back into the tabernacle, bathed, and put back on his priestly clothes. You see, because of the death of Jesus, once we repent and confess He restores us to a position of holiness. It is as if we had never sinned.

Please, even though that sounds so simple, let us never forget the horrific details of what it took for us to be cleaned up and forgiven. If we took time to fully realize that, we could understand why the next part of the ceremony took place. The High Priest offered up bunt offerings on behalf of himself and the community. The burnt offering symbolizes our dedication to live fully for God. It's not just carving out an hour or two to come to church. It means every decision we make, every though we entertain, every act we do, and every word that comes out of our mind should be dedicated to the owner and resident of our house, God Himself. That type of dedication to holy living separates authentic Christianity from fake Christianity.

#### **B. RETURNING TO A CLEAN HOUSE (26-28)**

Verses 26-28 describe the return to a clean house. The guy who led the goat out to the wilderness now must bathe and wash his clothes. After that he can enter the camp of Israel again. Think about it. The man returns clean. The camp is clean. The people are clean. The priests are clean and most of all, God's space is clean. Wouldn't that really demonstrate our love for God if we tried to keep our lives clean so He would have a clean place to live?

#### **C. REMEMBERING TO KEEP GOD'S SPACE GARBAGE FREE (29-34)**

And so verses 29-34 remind us to keep God's space garbage free. God commanded Israel to do this every year. Jews still keep this Day of Atonement to this day. We don't have any such command to keep the Day of Atonement ceremony. However, we are commanded to be holy. Lent, the 7-week period before Easter is a good time for us to fast, meditate, and deny ourselves in order to take time to reflect on our sin, to repent of our sin, to ask God to forgive us of our sin,

to dedicate ourselves to not sinning in the future. Even though we should constantly repent and commit ourselves to holy living, Lent is a great time to do that heavy duty clean up, take out all the garbage, and clean up God's house. The only response to God's free gift of salvation is to offer ourselves back to Him as clean places for Him to live in. Personally, I can't understand how any Christian cannot devote himself or herself to holy living when thinking about what Jesus did for us. **GOD HAS ALWAYS SAVED HIS PEOPLE BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH. AND HE HAS ALWAYS COMMANDED HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE PURE AND HOLY LIVES. OUR COMMITMENT TO LIVING HOLY DEMONSTRATES THE AUTHENTICITY OF OUR FAITH.**

## IV. EPILOGUE

Like many of you, I was raised in the United States and I grew up with an American view of what it means to be Christian. Most people believe that if they come to church each Sunday, do a few good deeds, and avoid major sins, they consider themselves good Christians. I think that the Bible describes an authentic Christian attitude like this. **SINCE JESUS DIED TO MAKE US HOLY; IT IS OUR DUTY TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.**

Let me give you my take on that type of attitude:

Let's say you invited me over to your house for dinner. As I ate the chicken, I just spit out the bones on to the floor. After dinner, I finished drinking my soda and threw the can on the floor. I ate peanuts and threw the shells all over the floor. I am positive it wouldn't take you long to throw me out of your house. But when we take sin lightly and when we don't pursue holy living, we are throwing garbage all over God's living space. How much garbage do we have to throw into our lives before God gets up and moves out? I'm glad God decided to move into my life. I am committed to keeping the garbage out and keeping myself clean for Him. I think the Apostle Paul sums it up nicely:

*"<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2 / NIV).*