

56 - The Door to Peace

John 10:6-15

There is only one way to come to God. There is only one door that leads to peace with our Creator. There has never been another way. At the very center of God's plan for the human race stands a cross, the cross of Jesus Christ. From Adam and Eve onward, for thousands of years, people offered animal sacrifices, and though they understood very little of what those sacrifices represented, every sacrifice that pleased God and brought grace to the worshipper did so only because it symbolized the future death of God's Son. At the heart of every true sacrifice someone would lay their hands on the head of an animal and confess their sin, thereby imparting their guilt onto that innocent victim which would then die in their place and be offered up to God on an altar. Then the smoke of that offering would rise up to heaven like a prayer. It was an appeal for mercy. That person wanted to be at peace with God. Sin was acknowledged and then transferred to a substitute. The death sentence that should have been imposed on the worshipper fell on the animal. By accepting that offering God mercifully allowed the penalty for one person's sin to be paid by another. He and the worshipper were then at peace.

Symbols

Now why would God desire such a thing? Why did so many animals have to die? Surely the death of an animal has no power to remove someone's moral guilt (Heb 10:4). Yet from Abel's sacrifice, of one of his flock, onward (Ge 4:2-5), God accepted such sacrifices when they were presented to Him in faith. Listen to how God responded to Cain and Abel:

"So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and His offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell" (Ge 4:3-5).

This was a very important moment in human history. God was explaining what He wanted from us. It was not wrong for Cain to present to God grain or fruit. That kind of offering is a way of saying "thank you" to God. In fact it appears Abel brought grain or fruit as well, but with that he also presented an animal sacrifice. And that was what pleased the Lord, because an animal sacrifice doesn't say "thank you;" it says "forgive me." It confesses sin and appeals for mercy. The Bible literally says here that "God looked to Abel and to his offering" (v4). He was teaching humans how to draw near to Him. Sadly, Cain refused to listen. But from that time on, up until the time of Jesus, men and women offered animal sacrifices. Why? Jesus will answer that question as He talks about the Good Shepherd and the Door.

The Shepherd and the Door (Jn 10:7-11)

• DBS (Mon-Wed)

The only door

When Jesus called Himself the "Door," He was not saying that He is a door, or that He is one of many doors. He was not saying that He was the door for that generation in that place. He meant exactly what He said. He is the door for God's sheep, all of them, in every age of earth's history. By laying down His life He made salvation possible for all humans. Before Jesus came to earth, people acknowledged their sin and called on God for mercy using animal sacrifice, but the only reason God accepted those sacrifices is because they were symbols which represented His Son's death. They pointed the faith of a worshipper forward in time to what was then still a mystery. Surely, even in ancient times, no one ever thought an animal could take a human's place. When men and women sacrificed an animal they must have understood that what they were doing somehow pictured a wonder that God would do sometime in the future. Without knowing how or when that might happen, they offered their sacrifices trusting that God knew, and however He would accomplish it, that sacrifice would cleanse away their sins. Before Jesus came all people knew was that they needed to acknowledge their sins; they knew they were supposed to place those sins on an innocent victim; they knew the victim must die; blood must be shed, and they knew that the animal's death was meant to spare their life. So for millennia men and women called on God that way for mercy, and they received it.

Here's a very important truth to remember: During all those years before Jesus came, no one was accepted by God because they kept the Law of Moses. The only way humans have ever been accepted by God is by acknowledging our sins and coming to God in faith that He will give us mercy. People who had already become righteous by faith used the Law of Moses to instruct them in how to avoid sin and please God. But righteousness comes only by faith, not by keeping rules. Rules guide righteous people; they don't create righteous people. And righteousness, being at peace with God, is available by faith, only because the Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep.

The only possible sacrifice

Without the sacrifice of Jesus there would be no forgiveness, not in ancient times, not now. God's justice demands that sins must be punished, not ignored. So without an appropriate sacrifice, one which is able to bear the punishment due all humans, God would have no choice but to drive us away from Himself. But God does love us and wants us to be with Him forever, so He did the only thing He could do to rescue sinful human beings: He sent the one Person whose sacrifice could open the door for all who call on Him by faith for mercy.



LIFE LESSONS

WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible
practically & understandably
and seeing lives changed by
the truth of the Gospel

So let's say it once more so that we're really clear on this point: All the sacrifices we see in the Old Testament looked forward by faith to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29) or as Jesus called Himself in the passage we read today, "the Good Shepherd [who] lays down His life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). Then once Jesus arrived those animal sacrifices were no longer needed. The symbol was replaced by the Person it symbolized. From the time Jesus ascended into heaven until now, men and women of faith look backward to His sacrifice on the cross which forgives their sins once and for all.

New symbols

Now we have new symbols: the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. They represent the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord when He died for us on the cross. They remind us that there is one finished sacrifice for the sins of all humans. Like those ancient worshippers who presented animal sacrifices, we too acknowledge our sins; we too place our sins on an innocent victim, and we too trust that the victim's death was meant to spare our life. And we too call on God for mercy, but as Jesus explained that day, along with mercy we receive much more. Listen:

A deep bond (Jn 10:14-15)

"I am the good shepherd, and I know the ones that are Mine, and the ones that are Mine know Me, in the same way the Father knows Me and I know the Father" (literal).

Those words pointed to a very deep bond between Jesus and God's people. He said this bond is as deep as the bond between Himself and the Father. Whatever else He meant by that statement, to say that our relationship with Him is comparable to His relationship with the Father is absolutely amazing. The knowledge which is shared between the Father and the Son is complete; it is unbroken; it is full of love, respect and honor. To hear that He knows us like that is easier to accept than to hear that we can know Him that way. We understand that He has all knowledge and loves us with a perfect love, but for Him to say that He has made it possible for us to know Him at that level is astounding. He is inviting us into a relationship with Him that is heavenly.

The question

The question is: Have you and I come to God through the Door? Have we placed our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection? Do we trust His cross, or do we hope to do enough good deeds to outweigh the bad? Or do we believe there is another shepherd, someone who's found another way into God's presence? In explaining to a group of zealous students of the Bible why they were not yet acceptable to God, Jesus told them that the root of their problem was that they didn't think they needed a Savior, because they didn't think they were sinners (Jn 9:41). And apparently they rejected the idea that Someone would have to die for them, that the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, must die to save God's sheep.

To people like that Jesus said, "I am the Door, if anyone enters through Me he will be saved." And then He said, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." That's God's plan. There has never been or even will be another plan. At the very center of history stands a cross, the cross of Jesus Christ. The question is, do you and I believe? Are we prepared to acknowledge our sins? Will we place those sins by faith on the innocent Jesus Christ? Will we trust that His death was a sacrifice powerful enough to spare our life? Will we, through Him, call on God for mercy? Will we pass through the Door God has opened and be at peace with Him?

Questions

- 1) The sacrifice of animals was a sad and ugly event: It was not meant to be pleasant. What was God teaching people through those sacrifices?
- 2) Is taking the bread and cup in Communion a blessing to you? What do you think about when you take those symbols? How do you feel afterward?
- 3) Jesus said we can know Him as deeply as He knows us. Describe a time when you felt very close to Jesus.