

If you have your Bibles, let's go to Acts chapter 2. I never understood, probably because I didn't have a lot of church background, certain phrases within the Evangelical community. First and foremost being this idea about Jesus being the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. And so, I want us to read a couple of verses here, and I want to chat about it and then we'll get back to Leviticus and just see how much this idea is in Scripture. Jesus, the night before He dies, gathers His disciples together for what would become communion, and He picks up this glass of red wine and He says, "This is the blood of the new covenant." Now, if you know anything about the Scriptures, that would have sounded unbelievably blasphemous to a 1st century Jew. "This is the blood of the new covenant." I drink it, you drink it. And they walk around the room, everybody's confused. So Jesus says, "Okay, let Me go show you." And so, they leave and they go to the garden of Gethsemane. They walk into the garden, Jesus takes three of what was then the eleven because Judas went to become Judas, and He takes His three and says, "Will you guys pray with Me here, keep watch with Me, for I am overwhelmed to the point of death." That's an interesting text if you ever want to dig into it to watch Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh being overwhelmed to the point of death where He goes a little farther, falls on His face and pleads with God that "if there be any other way, let's do it that way," while full on knowing that there is no other way. And so, Jesus comes back to His disciples and says, "Could you not keep watch with Me for even an hour?" They were all asleep, so the answer to that question is, "No, we can't." Now, He reminds them what's at stake, He walks back in, falls down and continues to pray. He comes back out an hour or so later and they're asleep again. And so, He wakes them up this time and says, "This time, it begins." A mob led by Judas Iscariot walks up to Jesus, Judas walks right up to the face of Jesus, kisses Him on the cheek and calls Him "good teacher," and Jesus says, "You betray Me with a kiss." It's an interesting text if you think about what's going in universally here. The cross of Christ is the response of God toward men for belittling His name. Let me say it like this. The cross of Christ is because mankind, loved by God, created by God, put into place by God, betrays God and prefers His stuff to Him. Judas Iscariot, who had walked with Jesus, seen the miracles, seen the power of God, kisses Jesus' face in betrayal. And in this one little picture, we have what's going on in the universe.

So Peter, who had only been rebuked twice in the last hour and a half, decides that he needs another one. And so he pulls out his sword and tries to fight the high priest's guards. It's an interesting animal, Peter. He pulls the sword and fights the high priest's guards, and three hours from then he doesn't want to fight at all. But he cuts the guard's ear off, Jesus picks up the guard's ear, sticks it back on the guy's head and says, "This isn't how it's going to happen. No one's taking My life, Peter. I'm giving it." So, they arrest Jesus, and they try Him, six times they try Him. Three of the six would have been illegal by law. It was illegal and forbidden for the Jews to hold trial at night. Three of those trials were in the evening. They beat Him severely at each trial. The Scriptures say that they pulled the beard out of His face. They yanked the beard out of His face, they spit on Him and they mocked Him. They blindfolded Him and then slapped Him and then said, "Prophesy. Who slapped you? Which one of us was the one that slapped you?". They pushed a crown of thorns down on His head, they gave Him a staff, put a purple robe on Him, "Hail king of the Jews," took the staff from Him and beat Him with it. And then Pilate, who wants no part of this, thinks that he can shame Jesus enough and beat Him severely enough that the Jews would let Him go. And so he beats Christ, God in the flesh, until He's this mangled, bloody body that he sets in front and says, "What do we do now? How about we let him go?" The crowd, who five days earlier said "Hosanna, Hosanna" and laid down palm leaves as Jesus rode into town, now screams, "Crucify him." And the art of crucifixion, and I call it an art because it really was an art form back in that day. I mean, it was designed by the Romans over a period of time. The Romans ruled the world, and in order to rule the world at that time, you needed a lot of fear.

And so, their idea was, "If we can slaughter men and women wholesale over an extended period of time in a way that's so horrific that no one would betray us for fear of having this happen, that would be ideal." And so, over a period of years, they came up with crucifixion that at times could take days for a man to die on a cross. They basically beat you and hang you in such a way that, over a slow period of time, your lungs fill with blood until you drown in your own blood. And they were like, "The act of death isn't enough. We need shame involved. So, let's strip the person naked, and let's put them in a public square where every lowlife imaginable can come out and taunt, can come out and spit, can come out and yell. Let's make a spectacle of it, and then the shame of the spectacle coupled with the agonizing death, this will be a deterrent for anybody ever rebelling against us." And so, Jesus is taken out, and He's nailed to a cross. And in the irony of ironies, the high priest is there mocking Him. Men and women spitting upon Him, quoting Scripture to Him. I mean, the whole thing's wrought with irony as His lungs fill with blood. The beating He sustained beforehand probably aided in the pace of His death. He died a lot quicker than most men on the cross. It goes dark in the middle of His crucifixion. A lot of people say that was God turning His back on Jesus. The problem with that is the Bible. Go read Psalm 22 this afternoon. God does not turn His back on Jesus ever. By the way, all the sins of the world, God was aware of them before they happened, so it wasn't like that surprised God all of a sudden. "All the sins of the world, I can't look!" Yeah, He can't help but look. He sees everything. And so, it goes dark, one of the Roman soldiers says, "Uh oh, maybe He truly was the son of God." Jesus utters, "It is finished." And the earth shook and the veil in the temple tore, and this is what happened to God. This is God's second response to the belittlement of His name in the universe.

Let me show you a couple of things about this. Acts 2, we'll start in verse 22. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." So the cross of Jesus Christ was not some surprise and was not plan B for God, but was rather a part of a plan that was known about in the Godhead since the beginning. God's response to the belittlement of His name, from the beginning of time, has been the cross of Jesus Christ. Alright, go over to acts 4. Look in verse 27. This one is even more interesting. "...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel..." Now for the record, that's everyone in the world. Gentiles, which is a non-Jew, and then the Jews. It would be like me saying, "You Americans and all other peoples of Earth." This is everyone. Everyone involved in the crucifixion has just been named here. But look at what it says next. Verse 28, "...to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Whose hand and whose plan? God's. The cross of Christ was God's idea. The death of Jesus was God's idea. From that first day when God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, in perfect unity, said, "Let Us make man in Our own image," the cross of Christ had its shadow going out across all of eternity. It was the plan of God. The death of Jesus, the wrath absorbing cross of Christ was the plan of God before creation. It stands, the death of Jesus stands as the central tenet of all we believe, and it's kind of weird. Like the fact that there's a cross on stage with me, that's weird. The fact that we have it on our necklaces, strange. The cross was designed by the Romans to kill men in the most brutal way imaginable. The cross is an instrument of death and shame.

The suffering, the brutal slaughter of Christ stands as the central tenet of our faith, and people have historically had massive problems with this. I read a book a couple of years ago. It was a pretty funny book. It was one of those books that didn't mean to be funny but was. There were saying the problem they had with the suffering of Jesus and the slaughter of Jesus was that it was this kind of divine child abuse. The problem with that is it's not like God the Father's whipping God the Son without God the Son wanting it. If you'll remember, Jesus says, "No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down." And then there are all these other people, they want to say, "Hey, the cross, it's gross. It's gross and there's all this pain and there's blood and it's horrific. I saw "The Passion of the Christ," it's horrific." And so, they want to make something else central. They want to make something else central besides the cross of Christ. In fact, I'm still trying to get over, a little over a year ago, a pastor of one of the largest churches in America said on national television, "At our

church, we don't talk about blood and we don't talk about sin." Well then you don't talk about the gospel, because the gospel is bloody and horrific. And if you don't understand the bad news, you will never grasp the good. What do you mean you don't talk about blood, you don't talk about sin? What do you talk about then? What are you saying? Be a good man? Be a good husband? Be a good daddy? I'm not saying those things aren't good, but I'm saying they're not central. In fact, all across the Evangelical landscape, people want to get away from the shame and the blood and the guts and the horrific slaughter of Jesus. We want to make something else central besides that. And we do that because it helps us elevate ourselves. Like, I'm a charismatic. I know it's weird, I'm a charismatic Calvinist in a Baptist church. It just makes your head explode if you know those kind of things. I believe in tall the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I believe they're alive and well, and I think if you try to prove that they disappeared with the Scriptures, you end up looking exegetically foolish. And I know, everyone wants to take you to the "Well, when the perfect comes, these things will cease," the perfect one's coming is the Bible. That's ridiculous, horrible, shoddy exegesis. Because the next line says that when the perfect comes, we'll know as we're fully known. Anyone? Anyone fully know like God fully knows them? No? Because I'll give you the face mic. I'll swap with you. I'll sit and take notes off you. So, I believe in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but let me tell you my problem historically with charismatics. My problem historically with charismatics is they want to make the day of Pentecost central. It's not central. And when you make the day of Pentecost central, as if the Holy Spirit wasn't in the world before that day, all of a sudden, you've got a lot of boasting in you. Because you've got this gift and God gave you this gift. And so now it all becomes about gifts, and it's not about worship anymore and it's not about standing in awe of the mercies of Christ, it's about dreams and visions and tongues and words and prophecies. And all those things are right and good and given for the edifying of the body for the worship of Christ on the cross. It always goes back there. Liberals, they always want to make social justice the center. Social justice isn't the center. It's good and it's right, but it's not the center. The Fundamentalists, and I don't mean that in a positive way, they think it's moral behavior and their motto is "Do, do, do," but the cross screams out "Done." It's the difference. Postmoderns, they love love, but let's play this. John 3:16 says, for God so loved the world that He what? That He slaughtered Jesus. Church growth consultants would think that a full building is what we're after. The problem with that is that historically, Christianity has been a small movement that affected every area of culture, and now we're a large movement who is completely impotent when it comes to affecting culture. So apparently, large Sunday services aren't where it's at. We could go on and on. I'm bitter. I have tons of these here.

Flip back to Isaiah. The cross was God's idea from day one. So if you start thinking about this God, who knows all events and all of the events that lead into other events, how amazing is it that God enables the Romans to develop the cross so that He might kill His son? Now, this idea of the removal of sin was put into place thousands of years before the cross. Moses leads the people of Israel out of Egypt, you know the story, Charlton Heston bangs the stick down, the waters raise, he leads them through it, they get to the other land and he says, "Here's what's going to happen. This is how we're going to relate to God." Because you can't come into the presence of God if you're not perfect because sin is filthy, God cannot allow you to belittle His name and so in the Old Testament, He's killing a lot of people. In fact, sometimes it's weird. Like the sons of Aaron try to draw near to Him and He kills them. The Ark of the Covenant starts to fall over and a man grabs it and God kills him. This is because you cannot be sinful and get near God. They just don't work. It just incinerates you. You can't get near him. And so God says, "No one can come near Me without blood. Somebody's got to pay for you belittling My name. So I'm going to set up a system by which for a season, I let you get by." And so, He sets up this sacrificial system that's extensive. When you get a chance, read the book of Leviticus. It's light, it will cheer you up. Get in there and read this book. This book is basically and outline that goes like this, "If you commit this sin, this is what it costs. If you commit this sin, this is what you have to sacrifice." Maybe two doves, maybe a lamb, maybe a goat, maybe a bull depending on what your sin was. And so, in the tent of meetings and in Jerusalem, blood was always flowing. Blood always flowed from the temple. Can you imagine the stench in Jerusalem? It's like every day, hundreds and thousands of people are walking in with a goat, a lamb, a chicken, a dove. And they're coming in and they're blood letting it. They're cutting its throat and draining its blood, and a river of blood is flowing out of the temple. And God

says, "Here's what we're going to do. Once a year, we're going to do something called the Day of Atonement. On top of all these other sacrifices, once a year, here's what I want. The high priest, the Levite of the house of Aaron, he's going to come before Me and he's going to bring a bull and a ram, and he's going to blood let those two for his family and for himself." So the high priest comes in, kills the bull, drains its blood, kills the ram, drains all its blood, catches those fools on fire and then walks out. He then bathes, puts on new linens, puts on a new turban, puts on a new tunic, puts it all on and then he brings two lambs, two goats. He brings in the two goats, he walks into the holy of holies after they've burned incense, he brings in the two goats and he confesses sin over the one goat and he takes the blade and he bleeds it. And then he prays over the other goat all the sins of Israel, and then they put that goat on a leash and lead him out into the wilderness. One goat absorbs the wrath of God towards sin. The other goat, the scape goat, they take the other goat into the wilderness, and the other goat carries away the sins of Israel. And this is the system they were in.

Here's the funny thing about the Old Testament. 85% of it is God saying, "I'm going to have to kill all of you if you don't quit this. Seriously, 85% of it is "I am destroying you" or "I am going to destroy you." And it's like, they need a lot of animals. I have no idea how they stocked as many animals as they were going to need. But even from the onset, God is very frustrated with the sacrificial system. Let me show you what I mean. I'll read this and then we'll talk about what it might mean. Isaiah 1, starting in verse 10, "Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" says the LORD; "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?" Now, here's the problem with the sacrificial system, both then and now. God doesn't need sacrifices. God's going, "I don't need your bulls, I don't want your goats. You're missing the point. I'm trying to communicate to you how disgusting and how horrible and how costly your sin is before Me. And instead of feeling that weight and instead of understanding that, you just keep doing what you're doing, but you keep bringing Me goats and bulls like that's what I really want." And the same thing plays out even to this day. I can't tell you how many Evangelicals, that are not doing Christianity at all, they're doing the Levitical priesthood. They're trying to offer God good behavior so that He might like them. They're trying to say, "I'll do this so that I'll make You happy." And we keep trying to lay things at the altar, and in the end, the altar's closed. I think they would have been highly confused here. Like, God commands them to come into His temple courts and make these sacrifices, and then in Isaiah, He's like, "Who has required of you this trampling My courts?" "You did. You told us."

There are all these things people don't tell you before you get married. I don't know if they're just like, "He'll learn soon enough" or what it is. Like, I'm a fixer, a type-A personality. I like problem solving. I love it. Give me a dry erase board and some markers and throw it out there, let's go, let's fix it. And I learned early on that my wife didn't really appreciate that. So she would talk to me and be like, "And this happened and this happened and this happened..." and I was like, "Let me show you what your problem is." It just went really bad for me. And then I got to thinking about this when I was thinking about this illustration. I was thinking, now I know, I'm almost 8 years in now. We've been together for 10, and now when she talks to me, I always go, "Are you saying these things because you want me to hear and empathize or are you asking me for help? What's happening here?" It's so funny, I'm so confident in all these areas in my life, and all of a sudden, I'm like, "Is this a trap?...Can I just ask a question?" And you know what I thought of? In 7 years, I don't think she's ever said, "No, I'm asking for your help." I don't know what this means, so I've schedules an appointment for us this week at the counseling center. I just don't know what that means. But let me tell you the lesson I've learned in marriage that was a painful lesson but I'm so grateful for it now. Like, there are some things in my wife and there are struggles that she walks in that I cannot fix. It does not matter how romantic I am, it does not matter how loving I am, it does not matter how many flowers I send or if I write her poetry or if I clean the kitchen or if I take the kids and let her go have girl time. Those things are right and good, but there are things in my girl that I can't fix that are between her and the Lord. And vice versa, there are things in me that she can't love me enough to overcome. The only way I would have ever known that is to try, to try to fix her, for her to try to fix me and to watch the increased conflict that takes place when you try to do that. You know

that feeling when all of a sudden you feel like you should be the Holy Spirit for your spouse. "I think God has a word for you...and I'm here to bring it." Has that ever gone well for anyone? "I think you need to read these verses, baby." What if the sacrificial system was given so that we would learn, no matter how much we gave and how much we worked and how many pricey things we sacrificed, we still couldn't fix what was broken?

Flip over to the book of Hebrews. Let's go to chapter 9, starting in verse 8, "According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation." Here's what He is saying is wrong with the sacrificial system. We can sacrifice all that we want and we can obey all the regulations that we want, but in the end if our heart isn't changed, then we're no better off. I think the illustration I've used here historically is this. Is the alcoholic free if he doesn't drink on Monday but everything in him wants to and needs to and he's in agony because he wants to do something he knows he can't? Is he free? The answer is absolutely not. And this is what Jesus tried to get across when He starts walking around Earth saying, "You've heard it say, 'Don't commit adultery,' but I'll say if you're lustful in your heart, you're not free. You've heard it say, 'Don't kill,' but I'll say if you're angry all the time, you're not free. You've heard it say that you should tithe this and do this, but I'll tell you, if your heart isn't fixed on God, you're not free." This is what Jesus is trying to say, that these acts of sacrifice, in the end, they're not doing anything, they're not cleansing your conscience, they're not setting your heart on the things of God.

So, Jesus picks up the cup, and He says, "The old covenant is over or rather is fulfilled. Drink this, the blood of the new covenant." And Jesus becomes the two lambs, the Lamb of God. And the blade of God's wrath penetrates the Son and bleeds Him and absorbs the wrath of God towards mankind. And the iniquity of man is placed upon the head of Jesus, so that at His physical death, the iniquity of mankind would be carried away. And this is what is meant by "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

There are all these other really beautiful things that happened that day in the universe, like rewiring that takes place, resetting that takes place. Almost everything that happens has a big theological word. So next week, I think I've called the sermon "A Series of Big Words." And we'll talk about words like "propitiation," we'll use the word "expiation," "penal substitution," "substitutionary atonement." There are all these beautiful, unreal things that occur on the cross that day... but that's next week.

Let's pray, "Father, thank You for today. Thank You for the cross. I pray that we could continue to feel the weight of our offense and at the same time, the weight of your mercy. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."