Ever finally get motivated to read the Bible from cover to cover? You know, you start out well and with good intentions. You work your way through Genesis; Genesis is a fairly interesting book filled with some good stories. You get to Exodus and Exodus is eminently readable. Ah, but then you get to Leviticus and you start reading about a bunch of wild stuff—boiling a goat in its mother’s milk, for example—and you’re having a hard time applying this to your life, and there’s no interesting narrative, no engaging story, and you get bogged down and you stop. All of your good intentions dashed to bits in the legalism of Leviticus. There are millions and millions of people out there who haven’t read the Bible precisely because they get bogged down in Leviticus. Are you one of them? So Pastor Scott and I are seeking to redeem the book; to turn it from the Least Favorite Book of the Bible to one that sets the stage for the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Stay tuned.

We’re going to look at just one of the offerings discussed in Leviticus; the sin offering. (Leviticus 6: 25) The holiness of God is deeply offended by sin. A Holy, Holy, Holy God cannot be in the presence of sin; the two are utterly incompatible. So the only way the sin can be erased is that something must die; blood must be shed and that blood will wipe clean the blot and stain of sin. This is the offering made for sin referred to in Leviticus. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6: 23) as the Bible says; something must die. “There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood”, (Hebrews 9: 22) the Bible says. “The life of the flesh is in the blood”, (Leviticus 17: 11) the Bible says. So Old Testament religious practice was to sacrifice animals and take their blood to erase the sin of the people. Endlessly, night and day, without ceasing, poor, unsuspecting, innocent animals sacrificed and their lives taken to wipe away the sin of the people of God. It was ugly. It was terrible. Imagine the stench. Imagine the sounds. Imagine the cries. Our sin is uglier. It is even more terrible. The stench of death hanging over a life of sin. Imagine how the righteousness of God cries out for justice. The tiniest of sin, all the sins we so easily excuse ourselves for, we so easily give ourselves a pass “Well, my sin isn’t as bad as that other guys sin”, it is ugly, terrible, obscene and something must die to take it away. Something offensive to the perfect holiness of God requires Either the sinner to die or something else to die. Only blood can wash away sin. Only the life in the blood can wipe away the blot and stain of sin. Something must die.

So envision it happening in this way. The Holy Land is HOLY and set apart for the people of God to be set apart and Holy in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God. But as human beings we sin and fall short of the glory of God. “All have sinned ”, the Bible says. “For all have sinner and fall short of the glory of God”. (Romans 3: 23) So consider this image. There is this sin and that sin. It causes this blot and that stain on the Holy Land. Like a smudge or a black mark on clean linoleum. Then more and more sin and fallen-ness. More blots and more stains. More offenses to the holiness of God. Pretty soon, no matter how many animals are sacrificed and no matter how hard the priests worked to take away the stain from the Holy Land, the blots and the stains start building up, Then the people start sacrificing children to Molech, a deep offence to God. Then they start worshipping foreign gods in the high places, an abomination to the Lord. Then their morality falls and they are no better than the heathen Philistine culture around them. And still the blot and stain of sin continues to accumulate. But now at a faster pace. (The blot of sin now up to their necks!!!) Until finally, and this is the history of Israel, some conqueror comes in, the Assyrians or the Babylonians, and they wipe out the people of God and shed their blood, and the land is cleansed another way. Ugly. Terrible. Imagine the scene; imagine the stench; imagine the cries. But, you know, God has a merciful plan. God has a better
way. A Sovereign and Holy God has a HOLY WAY to fulfill the just requirements of the law. He does not delight in sacrifice nor the shedding of blood. (Hebrews 10: 5) There is a new way and a better way that is to come. The New Testament book of Hebrews notes: “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin…” (Hebrews 10: 11) This references Leviticus. The sin offering works once and takes away one sin; but then tomorrow the sinner sins again. And so SOMETHING MUST DIE. Again. An animals’ life must be taken over and over and over again. Ugly the sacrifice to cover the even uglier sin. Terrible the shedding of blood, but only blood can wash away our sin…Something must die. SomeONE must die.

So the Old Testament law, the Book of Leviticus included, is pointing to something beyond itself. All these sort of arcane rules and practices point to a deep and profound mystery hidden by the law itself. The New Testament book of Colossians puts it this way: “(the Old Testament Law) is only the shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2: 17) So I’d like us to think about it this way; think about the shadow. Look at the cross and consider there is a bright light shining behind it and it casts a shadow. Now imagine that we cannot see the cross itself, we can only see the shadow it casts. So we look to the shadow to try to figure it out. We look to the Old Testament Law and Leviticus to try to figure out what is to come. And we observe the shadow. We see its form but we do not see its substance. We can make out its shape but not its reality. The sin offering, the unceasing sacrifice of animals to wash away our sin, is the shadow. That is what was seen. But it is the cross and the Christ hanging there that is the substance. The One who is to come and fulfill every jot and tittle of the Old Testament Law. One says: “I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.” The shadow from Leviticus is that something must die. The substance is that Jesus is the Lamb of God; it is HE who must die. God Himself will die to fulfill His holiness. SomeONE must die.

When my dear Mother passed away I was, and to a certain extent still am, bereft. I would lie in bed at night unsleeping. My heart would ache. It felt like I couldn’t breathe. I felt like I was having a heart attack, except it was just the pain of grief. I put on a nightlight in my bathroom and the little light would shine through the darkness, literally and figuratively. And one night I stared up at the ceiling all night. And finally I noticed that there was a small beam of light coming from that nightlight over my bed, perfectly. And I noticed there was a light from outside my bedroom window that provided the cross beam. It made a perfect cross of light directly over my bed. The cross loomed over me. It was light, not shadow. And each night I would look up and feel the presence of Jesus, watching over me, and His love for me, and His death for me, and His taking away the pain of life for me. Every night it was there. It still is. The cross looming over me and protecting me and forgiving me and taking away my pain and sin.

I take, O Cross, thy shadow, For my abiding place.
I ask no other sunshine, than the sunshine of His face.
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self, my only shame. MY GLORY, ALL THE CROSS.
(Beneath the Cross of Jesus, Elizabeth Clephane)

Something must die. No, beloved, someONE has died. And He has come today to cast the light of His cross over you...not that you might die...but that YOU might LIVE!!!! Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!