

The Day of Atonement

Sunday, October 13, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Leviticus 16:20-22; Hebrews 9:23-28

21st Sunday after Pentecost

- **Hebrews 9:24 (New King James Version of the Bible)**

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

- Introduction: To better understand the present, learn of the past. That is easy for me to say because I've always liked history, it was one of my favorite subjects. I was so-so at science, and I was never good at math, but literature and history were fun subjects for me. I know that isn't the case with everyone, but even if it is not one's favorite subject, it is one of great importance. The more we understand history, the better we understand the present. I found this quote about history from a retired professor with the University of London names Penelope Corfield that I found helpful. Here it is:

"Why on earth does it matter what happened long ago? The answer is that History is inescapable. It studies the past and the legacies of the past in the present. Far from being a 'dead' subject, it connects things through time and encourages its students to take a long view of such connections.

*All people and peoples are living histories. To take a few obvious examples: communities speak languages that are inherited from the past. They live in societies with complex cultures, traditions and religions that have not been created on the spur of the moment. People use technologies that they have not themselves invented. ... So understanding the linkages between past and present is absolutely basic for a good understanding of the condition of being human. That, in a nutshell, is why History matters. It is not just 'useful', it is essential."**

Just last Friday and yesterday, we had history as Christians presented to us. That time was the Day of Atonement, sacred to the Old Testament and observed by the Jewish people today. After days of prayer, introspection and repentance starting with Rosh Hashanah several days ago, the Day of Atonement is the great day of forgiveness in which the high Priest would enter the most Holy Place in the Temple (the only day of the year for this) and offer the blood of a slain animal for the forgiveness of sins, of the high priest, all the priests and everyone in Israel. Like all of the sacred days and sacrifices of the Old Testament, it has much to teach us of Christ and of His cross and Resurrection. There's one point of instruction from the Day of Atonement that I'd like us to consider this day.

Atonement is like...

- As I began preparing this sermon, I read a little bit about the Day of Atonement and a great source for subjects like this are the books written by Alfred Eidersheim. Eidersheim was a 19th century rabbi who came to the radical conclusion that Jesus really was the Messiah after all and he wrote several books about the Old Testament and the ministry of the Temple that are still in print to this day, and they are valuable sources for knowledge of the days and times of our Lord. This is what I gleaned from reading what he wrote about the Day of Atonement.

Not happy with rabbinic commentary on the Day of Atonement

Eidersheim strongly disagreed with some of the statements of rabbinic commentary about the meaning of this day. He criticized the teaching that a person's fate for the coming year was sealed on the Day of Atonement and that God decided who would live and who would die before the next Day of Atonement on that day. He also criticized the teaching that some sins were forgiven on that day, but others sins, however repentant the sinner may be, was not forgiven until the day of that sinner's death. There would be no atonement until then. Eidersheim found none of this in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel

One of the things that he did find, was in the detailed description of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-46-one that either exists in heaven or has not yet been built-there is no provision for the Day of Atonement. He believed it was because Messiah would provide atonement available to the repentant that would stand forever, never again to be re-established. Our Lord is that Messiah, who is the High Priest of good things to come who entered into the heavenly Holy Place with His own blood to establish Atonement, not for the coming year, but for forever. * * (Cf. Hebrews 9:11-12; 26)

- **Main Point:** The main point for today is in one verse, in deed, one word of one verse in Hebrews 9:24. It is "appears." "Appears" gives us a contact with God that is instant and powerful and profound beyond compare. In Christ we serve a God who is quick to forgive (1 John 1:9) Forgiveness is not sometime in the future, or maybe at the next Day of Atonement, or even reserved until the day of your death. Forgiveness is immediate. God is quick to forgive, and that is good news.
- **Application:** So here's the application. Appreciate and remember that such a covenant is to be cherished, neglecting it or refusing to repent is all the more disastrous. (John 3:17-18) (Hebrews 10:29)
- **Conclusion**

History can teach us much, and the historical feasts and sacred days of Scripture, still observed to this day, are worth considering. The Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Old Testament, just came by, and the more we understand that day, the more we understand the wonderful gift of atonement offered by Jesus, who has gone not into the great Temple of Jerusalem, but into the Holy of Holies in heaven, to offer His life for our sins, a sacrifice that is permanent and available today. It is a treasure beyond compare.

*http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/quotations/the_importance_of_history.html

Penelope J. Corfield, Professor Emeritus, University of London.

* * Alfred Eidersheim The Temple: Its Ministry and Services
Modern view of Atonement pp 262-263