

FORGIVENESS IS EXPENSIVE

LEVITICUS 17:11

Leviticus 17:11 **For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.**

The Major League Baseball season started last week. The home opener was last night. I love baseball and I'm excited about the Atlanta Braves' this season, *but I'll tell you right now, I won't be going to many games, and the reason: it's just too expensive!*

Good seats along the baselines at Truist Park run you \$125 a piece. Add \$50 for parking in a covered garage - everybody will need a coke, hot dog, and popcorn - then there's the shared program. Add it all up and the game is going to cost a family of four, \$639. That's way too spendy, even for a devoted fan like me!

In fact, if you listened closely to what some Braves' fans sing during the Seventh Inning Stretch, it goes like this... *"Take me out to the ballgame, take me to Truist Park. Buy me a coke and a dog on a bun - pockets are empty before the first run. But we'll chop, chop, chop for the Braves. If they don't win it's a shame. For it's one, two, three months to save until the next ball game."* For me, a professional baseball game is much too expensive. I'll just stay home and watch it on TV.

In fact, when you think of "spendy" numerous items come to mind... *a prom dress, a luxury car, diamond earrings, steak and lobster, (sadly) a gallon of gasoline, a gourmet coffee at Sixbucks... I mean, Starbucks...*

But more than all the above, there's one commodity that's extremely costly: **forgiveness is expensive.**

Once, a doctor's wife was vacationing with friends in Europe, when she saw a gorgeous tapestry. It was a perfect fit for her home. The one problem was its price tag. It read, *"\$25,000."* She sent a text message to her husband to see if she should make the purchase. He quickly texted back his reply, *"No, price too high."*

But the doc made an error. *After writing prescriptions he should've known better.* He left out the comma after "no." His text read, *"No price too high."* It was a nod to her to go-ahead. She bought the tapestry for 25 grand.

As for the husband, it was an extremely expensive mistake. Yet there is one item we would do well to obtain at *all costs!* Indeed, *no price is too high!* **Forgiveness is expensive**, but nothing is as important!

Now, you may disagree that forgiveness is a costly item. You may argue that salvation and forgiveness are free! It costs you absolutely nothing to be a Christian. And I agree, salvation is free, **but free doesn't mean cheap**. God's mercies come to us free of charge, but these are gifts that cost God a very steep price.

In Exodus 34:20 the Lord said to His people, Israel, **Exodus 34:20 "And none shall appear before Me empty-handed."** In other words, no one sashes' up to God with nothing to offer. Sin incurs a debt. If you've sinned, *you owe God*.

And if you're a human being I know you've sinned. If you won't admit it, *I'll ask your mother...* better than that, *I'll ask your High School teachers...* if you're married, *I'll ask your spouse...* And if I still don't get a confession, *I'll ask your teenagers* if you've ever blown it... **Case closed!** *Yep, we've all blown it at times!*

We've all violated God's boundaries. We've strived to live up to His standards and pulled up short of His aspirations. By our own fault, we ended up with less than His best. And now we can't just prance into His presence as if nothing's wrong... **we have sinned.**

I'll never forget the day my wife approached one of our sons, and asked him why he decided to carve up the antique mahogany bedroom set with his pocketknife. *Oh, he didn't do that!* He denied he did it.

Well, let's think this through, who in my family would carve the letters **"N-I-C-K"** into the surface of the mahogany chest? Not **"Z-A-C-K"** or **"M-A-C-K,"** surely not **"D-A-D."** **N-I-C-K** was guilty of a major infraction, but he was waltz'n about the house like nothing happened - *until his CSI Mom pointed to the evidence.*

Hey, God knows we've all sinned, and we do too. God is angry at our pride and selfishness. We can't play dumb. When we come to Him it's up to us to bring something to the table that will repair the damage, and make amends for our sin. As the Lord said to Israel, **Exodus 34:20 "None shall appear before Me empty-handed."**

Whenever I play Monopoly I always like to accumulate a few *get-out-of-jail-free* cards. They're nice to have when you land in the slammer. All you have to do is pull out your card, and you're instantly covered... *I like knowing that if I sin, I'll be covered!*

So did Adam and Eve. When they sinned in the Garden of Eden they realized they needed to be covered. They were naked, lacking, insufficient, inadequate... And their reaction to sin was to cover-up.

When God came looking for them they didn't walk up to Him as if nothing was wrong. They sewed fig leaves together to hide their nakedness. It was an attempt to cover over or make amends for their awful mistake - as well as, the shame and self-centeredness it caused.

Which brings up an interesting observation - do you realize that man is the only creature on earth that has to go outside of himself to obtain covering? *Birds manufacture their own feathers. Animals grow their own fur. Lizards and reptiles develop their own scales.*

But to cover ourselves, humans have to find something of value, external to our own person that we can bring to God, and God will accept as a sacrifice. *And according to our text that something is expensive.*

I like to know I'm covered. It's vital to be assured that on the day I stand before my Creator, and give an account of my life I'll have a *get-out-of-hell-free* card.

And if you don't have one of those cards, tonight I'll tell you how to get one. Yet first, I want everyone to realize how extremely expensive those cards are. And if you have one, I hope you appreciate it supremely.

In tonight's passage, Leviticus 17, God explains why the cost of forgiveness is so steep. Verse 11 tells us, **Leviticus 17:11** *"It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."* Here's a 3000 year old verse that assumes modern medical knowledge. Verse 14 also says of the blood, **Leviticus 17:14** *"(It) is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life."* If my doctor had written this text, he could not have said it better.

We now know the blood brings oxygen, proteins, and nutrients to the organs and tissues of the body. The blood sustains life, causes growth, and promotes health. Five liters of blood circulate within a human body. Just as an auto engine would lock-up without oil, likewise your body would shut down without its blood.

Have your blood drawn, and send it to the lab, and the tests will reveal everything that's going on in your body - the blood tells-all. Health and nourishment flow through the blood. **Leviticus 17:11** *"The life of the flesh is in the blood."*

And since Leviticus insists that the life is in the blood, a sacrificial animal killed on the altar wasn't smothered, or its neck broken. No, its throat was slit, so that it bled out. The absence of blood or *"the life"* constituted its death. For from the beginning of time, God had said, **Romans 6:23** *"The wages of sin is death."* *This is what drives up the high price of forgiveness.* God told Adam and Eve if they ate the forbidden fruit they would surely die. That's why to make amends for their sin a death had to occur.

As one author puts it, “Sin leads to death - it will not be denied.” In the end, sin requires either your own death, or the blood of an innocent proxy.

And fig leaves can't suffice. When Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves, God said, “*You've got it all wrong!*” He slaughtered an animal instead.

God clothed the guilty couple in leather. *Sin was covered by skin.* The debt of sin, death, has to be paid, blood has to be shed, *sin gets pelted with a sacrifice!*

Leviticus 17:11 reads, *Leviticus 17:11 “It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”* Here, the term *Leviticus 17:11 “atonement”* in Hebrew, “*kaphar*” means “*to cover.*” Thus, blood is God's *get-out-of-hell-free* card. It's what covers our sin.

The blood of a sacrifice is what makes up for the rebellion and mistakes we've made. Hebrews 9:22 puts it, *Hebrews 9:22 “Without shedding of blood there is no remission (of sin).”* **Spilt blood** is the high cost of forgiveness.

And this is the point, the book of Leviticus hammers home over and over. The price tag for our pardon is written in blood red. *Forgiveness is very expensive!*

In the first seven chapters of Leviticus, God gives the Hebrew people five different types of sacrifice. Four were animal sacrifices and involved the shedding of blood. In each of the four similar protocol was followed.

Leviticus 1:10-13 describes the grizzly procedure, *Leviticus 1:10 “If his offering is of the flocks - of the sheep or of the goats - as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish. 1:11 He shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar. 1:12 And he shall cut it into its pieces, with its head and its fat; and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; 1:13 but he shall wash the entrails and the legs with water. Then the priest shall bring it all and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.”*

Imagine being told by God to pick out an animal from your small herd. This is obviously a financial cost to you, *but this will cost you far more before you're done...* You're told you should give God your best, so you choose the pick of the litter. Thus, the little lamb you select is a favorite. Perhaps you were there when this lamb was born. You probably gave it a nickname. You watched it learn to stand, and stumble along, and frolic in the grass. This lamb has been like a pet to you.

But lately, you've done some stupid stuff - you've sinned against God and people. The priest tells you God isn't happy with you. He's upset at what you've been doing, and to avoid His judgment you need to offer a sacrifice - and it's got to be the best of the flock.

So you put a leash on little Rover, and walk him to the Tabernacle. There, you lay a hand on his head, and after confessing your sin, the priest hands you a razor-sharp, butcher knife. You gulp hard, and in one bold stroke you slit its throat, and this animal you've loved and treated like your family bleeds out on the ground.

And all the while you're slaughtering the household pet you're struggling with your emotions. Up until now you've known intellectually the wages of sin is death. *But is this fair?* This little lamb is totally innocent... *why should he suffer?* If I'd realized this is what would happen I would've thought twice before I did what I did.

Now you're watching your pet squirm in pain. You hear it scream; then whimper; then gasp its last as it slumps over in a motionless heap. You smell the stench of the blood as the priest drains it into a saucer.

Then you're told to chop up the carcass in pieces, and give them to the priest to carefully position on the altar to burn. *Your little lamb is now lamb chops!*

And you're the one that's now whimpering and squirming. It hits you - *your sin and stupidity took an innocent life.* You realize this lamb received the penalty you deserved. He paid the consequences for your sin.

Hey, no one who regularly went to the Tabernacle to offer a sacrifice ever tried to shrug off their sin, as if it were no big deal... *"Oh, I'm not hurting anybody."*

A trip to the Tabernacle was a reminder that sin does hurt. To cover sin blood has to be spilt... *Suddenly, what you knew in your head, now hits you in the gut.*

And this bloody experience before the altar causes you to appreciate the gift of forgiveness on a deeper, more emotional level. You're left thinking, *"My sin sent an innocent lamb to the slaughter. Sin is serious. Forgiveness is expensive. And I'm very blessed."*

When we come to worship God today we walk into a sanitized sanctuary. The floor is clean. The sights, sounds, and smells are pleasant. *You didn't have to step over a single carcass to get into the sanctuary tonight.* Blood and guts aren't splattered on the walls.

But if you had gone into the OT Tabernacle to worship, it would've been like walking into the meat market at Kroger - or better yet, a slaughterhouse for beef cattle. Blood splatters were everywhere. It looked like a crime scene. Death was all around you. Rather than cool music you would've hear the screams of animals in their final throes of death. Today worship is *G-rated*, compared to the OT's *R-rating* for violence.

Walk by the OT Tabernacle and it would've looked like the site of a drive-by shooting. It was a bloody mess. As author Kent Hughes puts it, *"The Old Testament*

sacrificial system... was a gory affair indeed! During the thousand-plus years of the Old Covenant, there were more than a million animal sacrifices. So considering that each bull's sacrifice spilled a gallon or two of blood, and each goat a quart, the Old Covenant truly rested on a sea of blood."

For 1500 years God drilled His people on the severity of sin. He ingrained in them the necessity of a sacrifice, **and the costliness of forgiveness**. No graduate of His sacrificial system would ever take lightly the bloody, ugly, painful consequences of sin.

Don't tell me forgiveness is not expensive! It's extremely expensive. According to the OT each year the Tabernacle ceremonies required 1300 animals just to keep up with the sacrifices required on holy days. This didn't include the many individual sacrifices offered throughout the year... If you don't think forgiveness is expensive just ask Rosebud, or Betsy, or Mary's little lamb... When God forgave a person of a sin you knew a death had occurred. A bloody, gruesome, violent death had to have happened. An innocent life had been extinguished. *Wow, that's costly.*

People tell me all the time, *"Well Sandy, I live a pretty good life. I don't beat my wife or kids. I don't cheat anybody. I've never pulled the trigger of a gun. I go to church when I get a chance. Hell is for bad people. I'll be alright. I'll make it. I'm doing my best!"*

There's one hole in your argument - **the wages of sin is not giving your best**. God didn't say, *"If you sin, then the remainder of the time you have to try hard, go to church, stay out of trouble, be a decent person."* When Adam sinned God told he and Eve, **Genesis 2:17 "You shall surely die."** Sin is covered by death and death alone.

A pardon is far more costly than a few good works here or there. God says if you sin somebody's got to die: **Leviticus 17:11 "It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."**

Imagine, a Hebrew in OT times walking up to the door of the Tabernacle empty-handed. All he or she had to offer were *lame excuses* and *hollow promises*...

"God, I don't know what got into me." "God, I'll do better next time." "God, when I get that new job, then I'll make the changes I need to make." "God, normally I'm a pretty good person" "God, sure I sin, but doesn't everyone. "God please, I'm working on my problems."

Come to the Tabernacle spouting that kind of nonsense and you'll get laughed off the stoop. The priest will have a question for you, **"Where's the beef?"** At the Tabernacle door, empty-hands look foolish.

There, it's obvious what you need if you want to be in a right relationship with God. ***Forgiveness is expensive.*** If you want to be assured your sin is forgiven you have to come with a sacrifice... And the same is true today! Forgiveness is free because the

price has been paid for us, but it is far from cheap. The high cost of forgiveness is **the spilt blood of a sinless sacrifice!**

It's interesting, that 1500 years of bloody offerings came to an end shortly after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The sacrificial system closed its doors. The Romans sacked Jerusalem, and dismantled the Temple and its altar. No longer did the Jews have a place where they could present their sacrifices to God.

And over the years, to replace those sacrifices Jews came up with alternatives to the practice. Jews today believe they'll obtain God's forgiveness because of their *good deeds, or charitable gifts, or fasting and prayers, or their observance of rituals and holy days...*

But the OT of the Bible, *the Jews own* Scripture, calls for the death of a sacrifice! Without **a blood covering** Judaism is a hollow and impotent religion.

That's why God shut down the practice of animal sacrifice. 1500 years of conditioning had been enough to show mankind our need. At God's appointed time He sent His Son, Jesus, to be the ultimate sacrifice. God put the sin and crimes of the entire world on Jesus' sinless shoulders, and offered Him up on a rugged, wooden cross to bleed to death for you and me. His forerunner, John, pointed to Jesus and cried, [John 1:29](#) **"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**

Though the Jews and their priests didn't know it at the time, the animal sacrifices they offered repeatedly, year after year, had all been symbolic of Jesus.

The sacrifice had to be **a male without blemish**, and Jesus was without sin. The sacrifice was slaughtered **on the north side of the altar**, and Mount Calvary is situated in Jerusalem just north of the site of the Temple. The sacrifice was **laid on the wood upon the altar**, and for Jesus the altar was a wooden cross.

And what every Israeli did to their little lamb at the Tabernacle altar, the Roman soldiers, *by order of Pilate and by the insistence of the Jews*, did to Jesus... **Nails pierced His hands and feet... A crown of thorns punctured His brow.... A spear slashed a gaping hole in His side... The executioners whipped His back into a mass of blood and shredded tissues... His beard was plucked, and his face was beaten beyond recognition.**

Jesus looked like the mangled victim in a car wreck, as if His body were severed with medal, and peppered with shattered glass. The sacrifice was slaughtered.

The sinless, innocent blood of Jesus was splattered all over Pilate's courtyard. Drop by drop puddle-up on the floor of the fortress... His sinless blood trickled through

Jerusalem's streets and gutters as He bled out carrying His cross to the place of His execution...

And on top of Mount Calvary, blood mixed with dirt. What blood was left in His beaten body stained the wood to which He was nailed. In a word, the crucifixion of Jesus was a grueling and gruesome ordeal... Literally, **the Lamb of God became lamb chops.**

If you'd been there - at the foot of the cross - **you would never again mistaken free with cheap.** You would've witnessed what God did to His only Son to earn forgiveness for you and me, and you would have whispered four words... **"No price too high..."**

You would realize once and for all that forgiveness is incredibly expensive. And you would've walked away thinking, **"Wow, He took what I deserve. He died in my place."** You would never again walk around smugly suggesting it doesn't matter that you sinned... **"it was just a little sin" - "oh, sin is no big deal" - "My sin isn't hurting anybody." Wait! Your sin just killed Jesus!**

And I'll tell you what else... you wouldn't stand there and let His sacrifice go to waste. You would stop clinging to your good deeds, and drop your excuses, and realize just how worthless your ambitions and promises actually are. And you'd cling to the Savior on the cross with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength!

You would value the sacrifice of Jesus above your most cherished possessions. You'd pin all your hopes for now, and in the future, on His grace and mercy.

Remember, no one ever sashes up to God empty-handed. We've all sinned, we're depending on something to cover our sin... What's your *get-out-of-hell-free* card? If it's good deeds, or hollow excuses, or noble ambitions and promises; then forget it! That's not what God requires. If that's what you present to God, you'll get laughed off the stoop! It costs more to be saved... *Where's the beef? Where's the blood?*

Here's the invitation tonight: **come to Jesus!** From wherever you are spiritually tonight come to Jesus!

What Jesus did on the cross was such a *"spendy"* sacrifice - it was a costly, and valued, and precious offering - nothing else needs to be added to what Jesus did, for you and I to be forgiven. Salvation is extremely expensive, but Jesus paid our price in full!

And here's the free part... Since you can add nothing to your salvation, nor can you do anything to improve on His forgiveness, God offers it to us at **no charge**...

Take it! Your only requirement is to lay hold of Jesus by faith, and trust Him with your life! Here's how you can obtain your very own *get-out-of-hell-free* card. Romans 10:13

tells us, [Romans 10:13](#) “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Will you make that call?