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COVER ART

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IT IS FINISHED

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD



LENTEN DEVOTIONS ON

ZECHARIAH
THE TRESPASS OFFERING
HIGH PRIEST HILKIAH

JEPHTHAH'S DEAL
PHINEHAS' ZEAL
SAUL'S HASTY SACRIFICE

“ZECHARIAH SAID TO THE ANGEL, ‘HOW SHALL I KNOW THIS?’”

LUKE 1:5-25

ZECHARIAH

Have you ever heard news too good to be true? Zechariah received news like this.

Like all his ancestors, Zechariah was a priest serving in the temple. For nearly 1400 years, priests like Zechariah offered sacrifices.

Zechariah’s personal life was also well established. He was married to a woman named Elizabeth. They had followed the same routines, for years on end. This life had its disappointments; Zechariah and Elizabeth had been unable to have children. But it was a predictable life. The way things were was how they would always be, it seemed.

But then something new happened. The angel Gabriel came to Zechariah while the priest was serving in the temple. Gabriel delivered a message about a new baby for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

This was good news. But was it too good to be true? It is no wonder that Zechariah doubted what Gabriel said. How could it be true? It was not merely that Zechariah and Elizabeth were too old for children. The angel’s words promised a whole new, better life—a different life than Zechariah had ever known.

Like Zechariah, we may also think the life we know is all there is. We know a life that ends in death. But then we hear about life without end. Isn’t this news too good to be true?

Zechariah asked for a sign to prove Gabriel’s words would come to pass. Gabriel gave it to him: Zechariah would not speak until his son was born. But Gabriel also said that the message he delivered came directly from God.

Like Zechariah, a message of a better life has been delivered to you—a life without sickness, sin, or death. Is this message too good to be true? No. Because this is God’s Word, a message directly from Him. More still, it is the message lived out in the Word made flesh, through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Good News is true.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

WE PRAY

Holy Lord, help us to recognize the truth of the Gospel, the good news of a better life. Amen.

“FOR THEN THE LORD WOULD HAVE ESTABLISHED YOUR KINGDOM
OVER ISRAEL FOREVER.”

1 SAMUEL 13:1-23

PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING SAUL

King Saul forcing himself to make the sacrifice sounds noble. King Saul making the sacrifice because Samuel is late sounds noble. King Saul dresses it up with self-effacing words and reasons, but God and Samuel see through this pretense. God rejects Saul as king. Saul’s actions were not noble. They were selfish.

King Saul made the sacrifice for himself. He was hard pressed by enemies. Maybe he was scared. The people were leaving him. Samuel was indeed late; maybe Saul thought Samuel was leaving him hanging, too. The people likely wouldn’t follow him without seeing the blessing of the Lord. A sacrifice should look to God, but Saul’s eyes looked only upon his political perils. He used the sacrifice for earthly political ends.

Saul was to be king. He was not called as a priest or a prophet, even though he did prophesy once (1 Sam. 10:10). He was supposed to be humble. He was supposed to accept the timing of God, who was his King. He was supposed to lead the people in war, but it was God who would bring victory. God could bring victory even if only ten people had stayed with King Saul. It would be better by far to lead by example in calling upon and trusting in God rather than to use religion to grasp at a show of unity.

The King who is also to serve as High Priest is Jesus. He fulfills both roles. As the King who sacrifices His own life, He rightly draws people to Himself and brings victory over our enemies. He is the King whose throne is established forever.

Our King calls us to serve in various roles throughout our lives. Whether we are leading others or following them, in doing so we should serve God, not ourselves. We point people to Him. We lead and follow with His light and life leading us all.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

WE PRAY

Our gracious God and King, be with Your people. Strengthen our faith so that we may humbly serve, trusting in Your timing. Amen.

“HILKIAH THE HIGH PRIEST SAID TO SHAPHAN THE SECRETARY, ‘I HAVE FOUND THE BOOK OF THE LAW IN THE TEMPLE.’”

2 KINGS 22:3-20

HIGH PRIEST HILKIAH

Have you ever heard of Marvin Minsky? He’s an award-winning computer scientist and the co-founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s AI laboratory. He also came up with what’s been called a “useless machine.” It’s a device whose sole function is to power itself down by operating its own “off” switch. You may have seen them in novelty stores. As soon as you press the toggle switch into the “on” position, a hand comes out from under a flap and turns the switch off.

During the days of King Josiah, the Temple had been given over to the service and worship of false gods. It had been reduced to... useless.

How astounding it is to consider Hilkiah, the high priest, announcing, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” It was found as they were restoring the building. Imagine how incongruous it would be to hear someone today renovating a church and announcing with astonishment, “Look here, I found a Bible!” Without God’s Word, a church is just another building.

Hilkiah brought the Book of the Law to be read before the king. Upon hearing it, Josiah tore His robes. What took place next was a remarkable restoration of the Temple and a reformation of the nation. Josiah had Hilkiah and the priests remove the vessels dedicated to Baal and Asherah from the Temple. He then reinstated the celebration of the Passover.

At the Temple, the priests would again sacrifice the Passover Lamb which pointed forward to the day when God would offer His own Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In repentance and faith they would look forward to what you and I now celebrate in fulfillment. “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

By Rev. David Tannahill

WE PRAY

Steadfast Savior, thank You that in Your house of worship I may hear Your Word proclaimed by our pastors and receive Your body and blood in the Lord’s Supper for the forgiveness of my sins. Amen.

“WHATEVER COMES OUT OF THE DOOR OF MY HOUSE TO MEET ME WHEN I RETURN IN PEACE SHALL BE THE LORD’S.”

JUDGES 11:29-40

NO SALE IN SALVATION

This passage leaves us with so many questions. Wouldn’t God understand Jephthah abandoning this oath? Why didn’t the Spirit prevent the reckless pledge or otherwise intervene to avert the outcome? Did Jephthah’s daughter die as a burnt offering or spend her days in celibate sanctuary service?

The divinely-inspired author doesn’t grant the answers. Jephthah’s name means “He [the Lord] opens,” but the Almighty’s lips remain sealed about these matters. Jephthah apparently couldn’t stomach the silence either. Not content to trust the Lord God’s past promises, he attempts to cut a deal with Him. The Judges’ historian focuses the account on a single moral: such an approach leads only to death.

Salvation by sacrifice is God’s story to tell. It’s never been about transactions—not even priesthood—as Jesus makes manifest in Temple cleansing. Our Lord arranged substitutionary atonement as a gracious relationship with a loving Heavenly Father. Nobody may—and nobody must—buy His favor. We don’t have to play God, because He stands in our place. Only His Son suffices to suffer our punishment so that we may be embraced by Him and embrace one another in victorious rejoicing.

Even Jephthah’s grief cannot reprieve his daughter from her fate, but our Father’s devotion brings not only Jesus back from the dead but us with him forever. Yet Jephthah’s daughter still sanctifies the unfortunate episode with Isaac-like obedience. This woman without offspring evokes the woman whose seed would serve as Savior. She echoes Eve’s faith in Genesis 4:1 (which Luther translated as “I have gotten a man, the Lord”). She also anticipates Mary’s “let it be to me according to your word,” (Luke 1:38). Let us likewise find our refuge in death’s shadowed valley and trust the Word of the Lord.

By Rev. Michael Salemink

WE PRAY

Father, sustain us in silence and spare us from death for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“IT IS A GUILT OFFERING; HE HAS INDEED INCURRED GUILT BEFORE THE LORD.”

LEVITICUS 5:1-19

THE TRESPASS OFFERING

There are many details concerning all the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 1-7, e.g., the specific animal or item sacrificed, the manipulation of the blood, which parts are burned and which parts consumed. There are two principles to keep in mind amidst the details: 1) The sacrifices are prescribed and given *by God* for the well being of the community of God's people. The sacrifices were not invented by people to “keep God happy,” nor to express what humans imagined to be their own worthy sacrifices.

2) All the Old Testament sacrifices are fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ. As Christians live in community, they see the sacrifices from before Jesus to be folded into our relationship with God and others.

The **trespass (or guilt) offering** is described in Leviticus 5 and 7:1-10. While the sin offering is a *mandatory* offering for atonement from sin, the trespass offering includes the provision for restitution for harm done to another person.

The text indicates that the trespass offering is for *unintentional* sin (Lev. 5:14, 18). The aspect of restitution leaves room for a sacrifice for *intentional* sins or crimes against one's neighbor—fraud, theft, adultery, etc. Punishment for intentional sins was banishment from the community and usually death, apart from complete repentance. The repentance acknowledged the offense against God and committed to restitution plus 20% to an offended neighbor.

God does not wish for anyone to carry the burden of guilt. In this offering, the Lord gives a way to relieve this burden and to mend a relationship with another person.

In Christ, our guilt is removed and the way is open to repair damaged communion with God (vertically) and with people (horizontally). Jesus made this possible. Isaiah wrote of the suffering servant, “The LORD [made] his life a guilt offering” (Isa. 53:10).

By Rev. Ron Richeson

WE PRAY

Lord, we feel the burden of guilt due to our sin. Thank You for making Jesus a guilt offering for us so that our burdens are lifted. Amen.

“PHINEHAS HAS TURNED BACK MY WRATH FROM THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, IN THAT HE WAS ZEALOUS WITH MY ZEAL.”

NUMBERS 25:1-18

PHINEHAS' ZEAL

How do you stop the manifest destiny of a nation whom God intends to bless? The idolators inhabiting the Promised Land found that armies could not stop Israel. Fortified cities could not stop Israel. They even tried hiring a prophet to curse Israel, but Balaam could not curse them. Instead, Balaam concocted a scheme to turn the Israelites against their own God through sexual temptations. This same tactic remains in play today (Rev. 2:14).

Israel suffered plague in punishment for their idolatrous dalliances, so Moses gathered the people and they wept before the Lord. Moses was laying out the path from punishment to healing when a tribal leader, in front of everyone, led a Midianite woman into his tent. In the face of this cheek, Phinehas acted. He did not wait to see what Moses would do or what his father the high priest would say. He did not look over to Joshua and mouth, “What now?” Phinehas was taken up with zeal for God and His people. He delivered the point of the punishment Moses had been trying to prescribe.

In the early church, Jesus was sometimes described as the “true Phinehas.” This echoed John's recognition that “zeal for Your House will consume me” prophesied Jesus (John 2:17). The Son of God saw God's people coming up short of the Promised Land, and He could not just watch. He acted. He came down to earth, took on His people's sin, and died in His bride's place. He received the spear in His side to issue forth pure religious rites. Phinehas' zeal is truly God's own zeal revealed purely in Christ.

How do you stop a people who can't stop entertaining lovers under every fig tree? It won't be by an army or by locking her up behind high walls or calling down curses. Absolute faithfulness, dogged purity, and zeal to show love even at the cost of shame and suffering—that is how God wins back His people. That is how He redeems and restores.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

WE PRAY

Give us zeal to flee idols and rest in You, our faithful Lord. Amen.