

It's Payback Time!

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this evening and we are in the book of Leviticus and if you've not come with the Bible we have some available in both transepts and also at the back do please grab a Bible if you'd like to use one but we're in Leviticus and chapter 5 and we're reading there from the middle of the chapter verse 14 so Leviticus near the start Genesis Exodus Leviticus the third book in your Bible chapter 5 and verse 14 the Lord spoke to Moses saying if anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the Lord he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation a ram without blemish out of the flock valued in silver shekels according to the shekel of the sanctuary for a guilt offering he shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest and the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering and he shall be forgiven if anyone sins doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done though he did not know it then realizes his guilt he shall bear his iniquity he shall bring out to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock or its equivalent for a guilt offering and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally and he shall be forgiven it is a guilt offering he has indeed incurred guilt before the Lord the Lord spoke to Moses saying if anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security or through robbery or if he's oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it swearing falsely in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposits that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt and he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock or its equivalent for a guilt offering and the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty amen may the Lord bless his word to us this evening well good evening everyone please do keep your bibles open at leviticus 5 14 through to 6 chapter 6 verse 7 if you can as we consider the last of these five offerings the guilt offering together over the course of several years the DuPont company a chemical manufacturing empire slowly poisoned an entire town Parkersburg West Virginia in the process of manufacturing their products there was a chemical runoff a waste that they would conveniently get rid of by letting it flow into a local stream that stream fed into the town's water supply and slowly it poisoned the town creating cancer in people in children and bringing a premature death to many in total more than three and a half thousand people were impacted by their negligence as their toxic waste slowly and insidiously seeped into their system there's an excellent film documenting this called dark waters where you see the story from the perspective of the lawyer who takes on this huge company on behalf of all these people who were hurt and he gets them to own their guilt say sorry clean up their mess and pay for their crimes it's a brutal film to watch but it's really quite brilliant and we love stories like that because we want to see justice done we want to see people who have harmed others clean up their mess and it's so frustrating when it doesn't happen we want people to be held to account but friends are we willing to hold ourselves to account for what if the mess is ours to clean up what if we are the ones in the dock declared guilty for harming another person what if we have made a mess with our cruel words our broken promises our lies and our fractured friendships because we all live in the real world and as much as we hate to admit it our sin will leave a mark wherever we go well the lord has a simple message for us clean up our mess take responsibility for our actions and their consequences say sorry ask for forgiveness and make amends because he wants us to be like him he doesn't want us to clean up the mess because just because he doesn't like it because he's a

neat freak but because he wants us to be a people who reflect him remember he is our creator god the god who takes chaos and formlessness and turns it into beautiful life-serving order creating a place for human beings to flourish together he wants us to be like him not treating his grace lightly or taking his kindness for granted but being so thankful for him that we lift up our hearts to him and praise and a heart that is shaped by god's grace will allow that grace to overflow into the lives of others by making amends and letting peace flow like a river into the world and community which you live in that is what we're going to be seeing this evening as we consider the guilt offering in leviticus that the lord god wants this church to be a people who don't treat him cheaply but worship him by taking responsibility for their actions and cleaning up their mess so as we seek to get to grips with this offering we'll do so in three parts we'll see the pattern the payback and the practice of the guilt offering similar to last week so firstly pattern and we'll look at the three sections of this offering in each part briefly and i think you'll have noticed just from the reading that this offering is really quite different from the others there's not that much focus on what happens inside the tabernacle you know the blood the death the

rituals the altar there's actually a lot more focus on what happens outside on the relational aspect of this offering if you want to read more of the blood sacrifice if you've not had enough blood and guts yet in leviticus it's detailed in chapter 7 verses 1 to 10 where the offering is told from the priest's perspective and it follows much the same pattern as previous offerings have displayed but the focus here is all on relational atonement becoming at one with your neighbor loving your neighbor as yourself so verse 14 to 16 first the lord spoke to mooses saying if anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the lord and this little short section speak of the holy things as they are called which is quite an odd phrase but it's easily understood in leviticus the holy things are the food that is offered and then specifically set aside and held back for the priests to eat that's their payment for what they've done we've seen this already if you flick back a page to chapter 2 to the grain offering there and look at verse 3 with me it says that verse 3 the rest of the grain offering shall be for aaron and his sons the priests it is a most holy part of the lord's food offerings that's all that's speaking about the food that is provided for the priests it's theirs and that was the food that they depended on to survive to get by each day so in taking that the israelite was taking their dinner theft was taking place and they were creating relational mess because of it doing so breached their faith it was an act of unfaithfulness to the lord and that's why what follows is key because i think we might expect to read that if any of the israelites did this then verse 15 as it continues bring to the lord his compensation a ram without blemish of the appropriate value so far so leviticus but verse 16 is where this offering starts to develop its own voice because verse 16 the lord says that the guilty party before offering his ram is to make restitution for what he has done by paying the priest the value of what has been taken and then adding a fifth to it and only then only once those two actions are done the guilty party has made amends of the priest and then verse 16 the ram is given to god only then has forgiveness taken place and the israelite the priest and the lord are all at one again next verses 17 to 19 now these verses are quite hard to pin down the exact meaning of for the situation that drives it isn't made clear in the text we know verse 17 that god's law is broken and it is realized and there's no restitution payment mentioned so it doesn't appear that anyone has been specifically wronged in this some commentators think that this might speak of a guilty conscience where someone thinks they get a sense that they've done something wrong but they're not exactly sure what that might be a sense of how they've sinned but they don't know how i don't find that quite convincing as there is a wrong committed and verse 17 guilt is realized iniquity is upon them and i don't think that the lord is in the business of getting people to pay for debts that are completely imagined instead i think this points forward to a slightly different use of this offering in chapter 14 there's a situation where a guilt offering is given for the ritual cleansing of leprosy i think it's pointing towards that where nothing was quantifiably taken from anyone else but their disease put in danger the lives of those around them it created relational difficulty that seems to be what this is pointing to and it's definitely how it's used in chapter 14 so next on to chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 and in this section it goes out of the tabernacle and into the world again if anyone is unfaithful to the lord this time in the way he treats his neighbor and he gives four examples of how that relational mess can play out verse 2 deceiving a neighbor in a matter of security of deposit so if someone asks you to look after something for them that belongs to them whether it's an item or an animal and you carelessly break it or let it die situation like that then robbery breaking the eighth commandment next is oppressing your neighbor and in leviticus 19 that's defined as quite unlike what our modern minds think of when we speak of oppression in

leviticus 19 it's refusing to pay a day laborer they are agreed upon wages which you've already disclosed with each other in full even though you know that they live hand to mouth that their day's wage was what their family needed to survive and then the fourth example finding something lost not returning it and then lying about it apparently the lord doesn't abide by the playground rules of finders keepers but these examples they're not meant to be comprehensive these are just the tip of the iceberg that's what the little phrase at the end of verse 3 is all about in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby making clear that there is more to this list and while there is a definite emphasis given to the financial aspect of this offering it does seem to have a broader scope than first appears leviticus 19 again states that it's to be used where a man sleeps with a woman a servant woman who is committed to another man and that's just a hint of something broadening the scope and we'll see more of that later of how this really is a broader offering than it first appears but the focus here is on financial things and I think that actually helps prove a very helpful point because it's quantifiable if a financial wrong is committed you can follow the numbers and see where the wrong has taken place it's not subjective this offering isn't just about having hurt feelings about perceived wrong but actual wrong where you have broken god's law against your neighbor and are therefore guilty because of it and as soon as that guilt is realized middle of verse 5 he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt the guilty party has incurred a debt and the lord is very keen that they go and pay it they're to make amends on the day and then only then verse 6 take the ram without blemish and sacrifice it at the tabernacle where verse 7 the priest makes atonement and then all is forgiven

I hope that's given you enough of a flavor of the offering to see how it would operate but let's sink our teeth in as we consider what the lord was teaching Israel through this offering so our second point payback and here we're going to look more closely at the two facets of this offering that make this unique and set apart from the others around it and this offering taught the Israelites that grace isn't cheap that repentance was to reach out into what was costly for them because these offerings were they were never meant to be used in a transactional sense you know you do the sin you pay the price all is okay no it was meant to deepen and grow their fellowship with the lord as they became more like him as they practiced his grace by bringing order out of the chaos that lives in their daily lives as they with his grace clean up their mess and the two facets we'll see that reinforce that are payment and procedure so firstly payment when the people sinned against man they were to make this restitution payment for their wrong plus the extra 20% the extra fifth so what is this doing here well two things it was incentivizing confession and repairing relationship now it was incentivizing confession as the penalty for not doing this was far greater

[16:58] Exodus 22 verse 4 makes clear that if someone is found out in their sin and a confession is kind of forced out of them if they've taken something from a brother or sister and wronged them being very unrepentant about it then they are to pay double the value of what they took double as the price you pay for your sin when you're unrepentant about it but in Leviticus if you confess your sin and make amends off your own back by the grace of God without the person having to chase you for it then you're given a lesser payment to make just the 20% extra recognizing that you have responded repentantly to God's grace that you regret making this mess and it repairs relationship it helps clean the mess as that little bit extra that 20% seems to be acknowledging that something wrong did happen that your relationship was impacted by it your trust was broken your sin against your brother or sister wasn't just an isolated act in itself which once the debt's paid all is forgotten but the relationship itself needs to recover too because trust was broken between the two of you and it's letting God's salvation flow into every nook and cranny of existence so that Israel would be a people at one with the Lord and at one with one another because the Lord wants to convert your whole person including the way you treat people he didn't only have eyes on them in the tabernacle and if they could they could just behave there everything was fine he views the whole of your life as something to be converted and devoted to him and that may involve him bringing you face to face with the people you have hurt by being humbled by your sin and having to apologize to make things right the Lord knows that our sin has real world consequences that people are hurt that they are harmed by our actions he knows what we're like and he wanted Israel to be a beacon of practicing real costly grace a place where broken relationships are healed and repaired where his gathering wouldn't be a den of infighting and relational tension so thick you could cut it with a knife but instead a place of harmony where brothers and sisters live at peace with one another just as they are at peace with their God and let's also see the procedure which taught Israel a valuable lesson now the first time

I read this offering I have to admit I was quite confused at this point because I thought it was completely the wrong way around because surely if sin is primarily against God you would want to go to him first wouldn't you but the Lord makes clear in this offering that he wants you to go to the person you have hurt first before coming to him and that you're to do it quickly do it on the day you realise apologise seek forgiveness quickly because he knows that our sin has real world implications he knows how we hurt people and the procedure of this offering suggests that if you were to go to God first before making things right with your neighbour that your offering would be somehow tainted that the Lord isn't interested in our worship of him if we're carelessly sinning against one another our worship is not a substitute for making amends for sin you can't offer your way out of apologising to that person you can't sing your way out of that detour or that friendship which your words have harmed so badly here's what one commentator very piercingly says on this he says one wonders how often the presence of God seems absent from our worship services not because the minister is ill prepared or the songs are ill chosen but because some of those in attendance are deluding themselves by thinking that by their much singing and praying they can conjure up the presence of God when what is really needed is for them to go and apologise to their friends repair bridges with their neighbours meet their obligations to their families and make practical amends for any cheating in which they've been engaged if reparation were made in these areas might we not see

God open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have enough room for it so for the Israelite hearing this guilt offering being preached to them the application was very simple apologise to that person settle that debt make things right with that friend and that may seem quite severe saying that our sin in relationships even those outside the covenant community impacts our worship so negatively that the Lord doesn't want to receive our worship if we're not repenting in our relationships but they are deeply connected things because the Lord wants our whole lives to be worship to him and what would the Lord Jesus say about that well he would say this as he really broadens the scope of the guilt offering in Matthew 5 he would say this but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire so if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift at the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift it's worth us considering if the Lord is happy to receive our worship right now he knows that we're not sinless but he desires the worship of genuinely repentant people is your worship as you listen to the Lord's word acceptable to him right now or in a few minutes when we're singing together to worship him will he be pleased to hear it you might hit all the right notes

I know I won't but maybe you will but if you have a sin that you are not repentant for it doesn't matter how pitch perfect and beautiful your voice might sound to us to the Lord it is like nails on a chalkboard real real repentance makes us have uncomfortable conversations where we admit to people in our lives that we have wronged them now I don't want to be misunderstood here there are some relationships that very sadly may never recover from sin some forgiveness that may be sought but never granted by the person wronged some people who will never forgive it's still a fallen world we live in and this offering isn't saying that you absolutely must settle every single tiny score and every tiny debt you owe from even your childhood before coming to Jesus this isn't a gospel of works but this certainly isn't a gospel of cheap grace either because what was costly for the Lord cannot be cheap for us and that brings us to our final point practice and here we're seeing how we put this offering into practice today as Christians as the guilt offering is applied to us today our church is to be one which prizes

[25 : 38] God's grace that loves him for being so generous to us that receives his forgiveness with glad hearts and delights in putting that into practice in the real world where we as sinful people have made an almighty mess in our relationships because God's grace is costly and it cannot be cheap for us let's consider the ram of the guilt offering now this was a good cost to the person involved animals weren't cheap but the cost of the Lord is far greater because the ram of the guilt offering was only ever pointing forwards to Christ as the people offered this ram they were offering Christ that's what Isaiah wanted us to understand when he wrote of the suffering servant who would bear our griefs carry our sorrows and we by his wounds would be healed that's the passage we read every Christmas time that the suffering servant would be pierced and crushed all for our iniquity yet Isaiah 53 verse 10 says it was the will of the Lord to crush him and make him an offering for guilt and that's the exact same Hebrew word offering for guilt as we have translated in our passage for

guilt offering

Jesus is our guilt offering he is the perfect unblemished ram we need to be clean and pure before the Lord he's the only hope we have the Lord's grace was not cheap for him anyway he gave up his perfect one and only son so that we an undeserving unclean sinful and guilt ridden people may be free in Christ his grace was concrete lavish generous and full of love as his son repaired the relationship between the Lord and his people now this would be a very tempting point for us to end the sermon wouldn't it we've considered how the guilt offering applied to Israel and seen that it all pointed forwards to Christ how he is our guilt offering and yes he is amen to that but the Lord Jesus doesn't want us to stop there because he believes that we ought to be practicing the guilt offering today it might not be a demand in black and white like it is in Leviticus but it certainly is his desire let's take a trip to the house of a man who created a huge amount of relational mess to see what Jesus means we are given in the Bible an example of the guilt offering at its finest in human form that we can see and learn from and it comes from one of Israel's most notorious sinners who if he listed all the people he had wronged you'd be horrified that's a lot of mess and that man's name is Zacchaeus this little sinful man who had treated people so poorly had stolen from them financially had taken advantage of them and abused his position as the tax collector this man is our prime example of the guilt offering today for when he met Jesus and was confronted with his sin he didn't shirk away from it he didn't say that Jesus has paid his debts so his obligation to his fellow man was over so all those legitimate complaints other people had against him were dealt with he didn't need to clear up the mess instead once Jesus confronted him Zacchaeus rushed out on the day immediately and settled his debts paying back four times what he owed and he even went further than that by giving half of his possessions to the poor so how did Jesus respond to Zacchaeus did he say something like this well Zacchaeus why on earth would you do something like that you're still clinging to the old ways aren't you don't you know you're not under the law anymore you're under grace now you're free from the law's demands

I'm I'm the guilt offering you can't add anything to me do you think my sacrifice isn't enough for you you still have so much to learn young brother of course Jesus doesn't say that at all does he no he says once Zacchaeus has practiced his costly grace that salvation has come to this house for the son of man has come to seek and to save the lost and he means people like Zacchaeus people who know how much they owe God how much messy guilt they have in their lives and are willing to do what is costly to seek forgiveness and make amends and even better Zacchaeus didn't just give the extra 20% he didn't even give double but four times the amount he stole he gave double and then doubled it all over again he gave even more than the law required not less the Lord Jesus doesn't loosen the law's commands for his people he wants us to embody them in even greater ways than the Israelites were called to because if anything we have more reason to obey this command as we've seen what this ram was always pointing to don't we we have seen how Christ has paid our debt with the Lord we have seen the great cost of God's offering for guilt so friends has salvation come to your house has salvation spread out into your earthly relationships which have been impacted by your sin is your repentance real there is a great danger that as we read this offering we just think that well

God's going to clear up all of our relational mess for us but since Christ has paid for our sins we can just ignore the real people in our lives who bear God's image and we have harmed and that is a distortion of God's grace where you're making it so cheap that you can just take it for granted you know it might sound really spiritual to say something like this I know I've sinned in the past I know I've hurt people I'm well aware of the ways in which I've sinned against my neighbour but all is forgiven in Christ implication being that they've got no intention of making amends in their lives for the mess that they've made that attitude well it's like a toddler who throws their toys all over the floor without thought leaving a huge mess but don't worry mummy will clear it up mummy always clears it up and that's a dangerous attitude because well it's partly true because Christ has paid our debt he is our guilt offering he is the one whose blood cleanses our conscience our heart and amends all our wrongs and we can add nothing to him but the Lord's grace is not cheap in fact it is deeply costly isn't that what we're reminded of when we consider that suffering servant passage in Isaiah that the Lord gave us what was most costly for him for the sake of our souls and we shouldn't despise that grace by taking it for granted

[33 : 52] Jesus desires us not to do less than the law requires but more in the words of Hebrews how much more because while God's grace is free it is also costly let me share something that

Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German minister and theologian who was killed in Nazi Germany wrote about that he said this costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again the gift which must be asked for the door at which a man must knock such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it is grace because it calls us to follow Christ it is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life it is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner above all it is costly because it costs

God the life of his son you were bought with a price and what was costly for the Lord cannot be cheap for us so friends are you treating the grace of God cheaply or are you valuing the Lord Jesus as most valuable most costly and letting him transform and being obedient to him in your earthly relationships he is not only bothered about what happens when you cross the threshold into church on a Sunday morning that if we can all just behave for an hour then everything is fine like smiling for the family photo before tearing lumps out of each other there is not a part of your life marked spiritual and a part of your life marked common the Lord cares deeply about our whole lives all is holy to him including our personal relationships and for some of us that means that the application would be that before you come to church next week before you call upon the name of the Lord and come into his very presence say sorry to that person seek them out ask them to forgive you make amends don't bring our disagreements and our proud hearts into his presence but humble ourselves by admitting our transgressions our cruel words our sin if you're here worshipping this evening and you know that all is not well in your personal relationships that you owe a debt that you have wronged someone then by

God's grace go to them and ask for forgiveness and do it today confess to the Lord and one another and he will make you clean let us be a church where disagreements are short lived where forgiveness is sought and forgiveness is granted where relationships heal where there is no one you want to avoid sitting next to on a Sunday because of how difficult your friendship is where friendships don't die because of sin because that is a church that values the grace of God as the most precious thing that this world affords that is a church which values and practices God's costly grace that is a church whose praise however out of tune out of time and off key it is sounds beautiful to the

Lord that is a church whose worship the Lord is glad to receive brothers and sisters will we be a church like that let's pray that we will our father God we thank you for your son who is our guilt offering we thank you that you gave us your costly grace that you gave us your perfect unblemished holy son to pay the debt of our sin please father help us to mirror your grace be sowing the seeds of repentance in our hearts by making us a people who practice and live lives of costly grace just like our brother the Lord Jesus in his name we pray amen