

Jesus the Great High Priest

Chapter IV

By J. C. Philpot

The priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ divides itself into two distinct branches, corresponding to those two mighty works of grace and love of which one was finished by him upon earth, and the other is now being carried on by him in heaven. These two distinct works were, 1, to offer sacrifice for sin; 2, to make intercession for his people. We have termed them distinct works, rather with a view to help our conceptions than with any intention really to separate them; for, in point of fact, they are most closely and intimately connected with each other and in a measure blended together, for when our blessed Lord offered himself without spot to God he made intercession by his blood, and now that he is in heaven the merits of that blood are still pleading before the throne. Thus we find the prophet connecting together the bearing of sin with intercession for sinners, in those striking words, "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors," (Isa. 53:17)—his intercession for transgressors being made at the time and by the very means of his bearing their sin. "Father, forgive them," was his interceding breath at the very time when he was bearing sin in his own body on the tree. (Luke 23:34)

So, in type and figure, on the great day of atonement, the high priest took of the blood of the sin offering within the veil and sprinkled it upon and before the mercy seat, thus connecting together the sacrifice at the altar without, with the intercession in the most holy place within. When we approach that part of our subject in which we shall have to contemplate our gracious Lord as even now at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us, (Rom. 8:34) we shall endeavor, with God's help and blessing, to enter more fully into the connection between his bearing sin on the cross and his interceding in heaven; but our chief object at present is to open up the mystery of dying love and atoning blood which was consummated in the garden and on the cross.

As the Levitical sacrifices throw much light on the one offering whereby Jesus perfected forever them that are sanctified, we have already made much use of them, and if our limits admitted should be glad to enter still more largely into their nature and spiritual interpretation; but, as our space is necessarily restricted, we think it best to confine ourselves to two offerings prescribed under the law—the burnt offering and the sin offering. These were not only the two most important sacrifices of the Levitical dispensation, and are therefore specially named,

Psalm. 40:6, "Burnt offering and sin offering have you not required," but have an especial claim upon our attention as representing our suffering High Priest under two distinct aspects, yet each full of grace and glory.

The burnt offering, as we have already pointed out, represents him chiefly as he was to God; the sin offering as he is to man. In both he was represented as a sin-bearer, for in both of these sacrifices a transference was made of sin by the priest laying his hand on the head of the victim; (Lev. 1:4; 4:4) in both the blood of the victim was shed and sprinkled; (Lev. 1:5; 4:4-6) in both atonement was made for sin; (Lev. 1:4; 4:20) and both were burnt either wholly or in part upon the altar. (Lev. 1:9; 4:9, 10) Those were their points of union sufficiently close to show that they corresponded in representing the sacrifice offered by our great high Priest on the cross.

But there were distinctive differences between them of a character sufficiently marked to show that they represented this sacrifice under different aspects. Thus the burnt offering was voluntary, the sin offering was compulsory; the burnt offering was flayed, cut into pieces, and the inwards and legs washed in water; but not one of these three things was required in the sin offering; the blood of the burnt offering was merely sprinkled round about upon the altar, (Lev. 1:11) but the blood of the sin offering was put upon the horns of the altar, sprinkled seven times before the Lord before the veil of the sanctuary, and poured out at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering; (Lev. 4:6, 7) the whole of the burnt offering was burnt upon the altar, (Lev. 1:13) but the fat only of the sin offering, that is the internal fat which covers the kidneys, was burnt on the altar; for the skin and flesh, even the whole of the bullock, was to be carried forth without the camp, into a clean place, and there burnt on the wood with fire. (Lev. 4:11, 12) We see, therefore, that though in some points the burnt offering and the sin offering resembled each other, yet that in others they widely differed; and as we may be sure that the Holy Spirit intended to convey instruction by these differences, we may, with his help and blessing, attempt now to enter on their mystical and spiritual meaning.

1. The burnt offering was wholly *voluntary*. This was one of its most distinctive features. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish—he shall offer it *of his own voluntary will* at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord." (Lev. 1:2, 3) But the sin offering was compulsory. "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them; if the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people, then let him bring for his sin, which he has sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering." (Lev. 4:2, 3)

When the sin was discovered, no choice was given whether atonement should be made for it, but it was imperatively required that the sin offering should be made. It is called indeed a sin of ignorance, but much more was intended, both by that expression and by the sin offering made for it, than at first sight might appear. We shall therefore attempt to explain by-and-by what was intended by "sins of ignorance;" but at present our object is to show the distinction between the burnt offering and the sin offering, in that the former was voluntary and the latter compulsory. In one sense the sacrifice of the blessed Lord was voluntary, in another compulsory; and thus the two kinds of offering represent these two distinct features of the one propitiation for sin which he offered upon the cross.

The word of truth brings before us, very vividly and clearly, in various passages, both these aspects of our suffering High Priest. Thus we read that Jesus "loved the church and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25.) "Who loved me," says the Apostle, "and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) "As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." (John 10:15, 17, 18) In these passages our blessed Lord is represented as freely loving and freely giving himself for his Church and people, as freely and voluntarily laying down his life for his sheep, and freely taking it again. No compulsion is here. As Judah freely offered himself to his father Jacob, to become surety for Benjamin, (Gen. 43:9) so Jesus freely offered himself to his heavenly Father, to become Surety for his brethren. He could therefore say, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do your wills O my God; yes, your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:7, 8)

In this voluntary offering of himself to do the Father's will, in these promptings of love to give himself for the Church, in these actings of pure mercy to come forth from the Father's bosom to take the sinner's place, and, as the suffering Surety of his people, to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is signally displayed. Where is love equal to his love? Where was sorrow equal to his sorrow? These promptings and actings of pure, free, and voluntary love, as apprehended by a living faith, and realized in sweet experience, make the Lord Jesus Christ unspeakably precious to believing hearts. "You know," says the Apostle, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. 8:9) "We love him," says holy John, "because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) This pure, unmerited love of Jesus, to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins, as shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, constrains redeemed and regenerated sinners to love him, and to live to his praise, as one testified, to whom it was given not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, "For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead—and that he died for all, that those who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which

died for them, and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15) In our contemplations, therefore, of Jesus as the High Priest, we must fix our eye steadily on the free and voluntary character of his undertaking, when, in the councils of the eternal covenant, he graciously undertook to become the Father's servant; and though he was a Son, an eternal, a true, and real Son, to learn obedience by the things that he would suffer. This phase of our blessed Redeemer's character is beautifully typified by the sacrifice of the burnt offering.

But, when in the councils of eternity, ratified by the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, he had undertaken to become Surety, then what was before purely free and voluntary became in a sense compulsory. There is a sense, a gracious sense, in which the word compulsion may even be used of God himself. For instance, when he had sworn by himself to bless Abraham, (Gen. 22:16, 17) he was bound, so to speak, by his own oath to perform what he had promised; and therefore the Apostle tells us it was to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel. Moses, therefore, when he pleaded with the Lord on behalf of the people who had worshiped the golden calf, urged this oath as his most prevailing plea—"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever." (Exod. 32:13)

As, then, when God had bound himself by oath to bless Abraham, he was, so to speak, tied by his own oath; so, when our blessed Lord had once bound himself by covenant engagements to stand in his people's place and stead, he was no longer free. He had become like the Hebrew servant, who, though free to go out in the seventh year, yet if he said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free;" and if, in pursuance of this free determination, his master had bored his ear to the door-post, was then free no longer. So, when our blessed Lord said to his heavenly Father, "My ears have you opened," (margin, "dug," in especial reference to this voluntary servitude of the Hebrew bondman), he was no longer free. He was now God's "servant, whom he upheld, his elect in whom his soul delighted;" (Isa. 42:1) his servant in whom he would be glorified, given as a light to the Gentiles, that he might be his salvation unto the ends of the earth. (Isa. 49:3, 6) Not that he wished to be free, not that he repented of his eternal engagements; on the contrary, he could say, in the days of his flesh, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." (Luke 12:50)

But we find, from various passages, which give us, as it were, a view into the depths of his suffering experience, that there were shrinkings in his holy soul from the cup which he had undertaken to drink. Thus, even before the hour of Gethsemane's suffering, as if in anticipation it even then cast its gloomy shade over him, he said, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour;" (John 12:27) "Father, save me from this hour;" there is the shrinking of the victim. "But for this cause

came I unto this hour;" there is the holy resignation to the Father's will. And when he came into that overwhelming trouble of soul, of which he says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me;" (Psalm 69:2) when in Gethsemane's gloomy garden, he was "in an agony, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground;" (Luke 22:44) when before the chief priests and elders, and all the council, "he held his peace," (Matt. 26:63) and in the presence of Pontius Pilate "answered him not a word," (Matt. 27:14) fulfilling thereby the prophetic declaration, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth;" (Isa. 53:7) and more especially on the cross, when, as the bitterest ingredient in his cup of suffering, his Father hid his face from him—in all these circumstances of sorrow, shame, and ignominy, we see not only what the blessed Lord suffered as bearing the weight of sin, but why his holy soul shrank in the prospect of bearing the load.

That he voluntarily undertook to suffer did not make the sufferings less. No, the weight of the suffering enhanced the freeness of his grace. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," was but the utterance of the agony of his holy soul in the first tasting of the Father's wrath, when, bowed down with grief and sorrow, he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him who was able to save him from death. (Heb. 6:7) But he had undertaken, and must go through. The word had gone forth, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." (Psalm 118:27) The sin offering was now to be sacrificed. As the burnt offering, Jesus had voluntarily yielded himself up to be wholly consumed in the flames of divine wrath, yet of self-sacrificing love. But now he stands as a sin offering by the altar; for God "made him to be sin for us who knew no sin;" (2 Cor. 5:21) and as the literal victim was bound with cords to the horns of the altar, that its struggles might be restrained while its blood was being shed, so was its Antitype, the holy Lamb of God, spiritually bound to the horns of the altar, not only by the cords of his own loving heart, not only by the firm cords of the fixed, immutable will of his heavenly Father, but by the no less strong cords also of his own eternal covenant engagements. He had promised, and must perform. Thus, though free, he was bound.

This union of perfect freedom and self-imposed bondage we see not only in the case of the Hebrew servant which we have already adduced—but as a matter of continual experience in human affairs. Thus I may be asked to become surety for a person. I am free to accept the request—or free to decline it. But if I accept it, and become his surety, I am free no longer, but am bound by my engagement, and the still stronger ties of the law. Or if a friend needs my help, I am free to give it, or to withhold it. But if I once promise to grant his petition, I am no longer a free agent, but am bound to perform my promise. "Pay that which you have vowed. Better is it that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay." (Eccl. 5:5) Jesus, therefore, was bound by his own engagements to finish the work which the Father had given him to do. Justice arrested him, as standing in the sinner's place. Being "made under the law," (Gal. 4:4) the curse of the law fell

upon him, for he was made a curse for us; (Gal. 3:131) and having become Surety for his brethren, as they could not pay the weighty debt, he groaned (Prov. 11:15) under it, that he might discharge it to the utmost fraction.

2. And this leads us to another feature of the sin offering, in which this substitution of Christ in the sinner's place is more clearly and distinctly typified. Before he slaughtered the victim, the sacrificing priest *laid his hand on its head*. "If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the Lord." (Lev. 4:3, 4) This act represented the transference of sin from the transgressor to the victim. It identified, as it were, the one with the other. It typified the substitution of the victim for the transgressor, and declared by a visible sign that it bore his sins and endured their penalty, which was suffering and death. Watts has well expressed the feelings of a believing heart, as realizing this substitution, when he writes,

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of yours;
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin."

But as this transference of sin was more fully and completely brought out in the case of the scapegoat, we shall direct our readers' attention to that solemn transaction on the great day of atonement. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." (Lev. 16:21) How striking is the figure whereby Aaron is represented as laying "both his hands," as if they were filled with the sins of Israel, upon the head of the live goat, and confessing "all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat." How we see by faith all the iniquities of the children of God and all their transgressions with all their sad slips and falls, all their base backslidings, and all the horrid crimes which have lain with such guilt and weight upon their bleeding consciences, put upon the sacred head of Jesus; "made to meet," as the prophet speaks, (Isa. 53:6, *margin*) like a mighty flood rushing upon him from a thousand confluent streams. Jesus was, from his first entrance into this evil world, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As the Lamb of God, he was bearing the sin of the world, (John 1:29, *margin*) at the very time when John the Baptist bore testimony of him in the wilderness. When yet going about doing good to the bodies and souls of men during the exercise of his public ministry, he was by imputation taking our infirmities and bearing our sicknesses. (Matt. 8:17)

But it was in the garden and on the cross that the Lamb of God chiefly bore the weight of imputed sin. As Berridge says, "The garden scene begins his woes"—

not that they had not begun before, but hitherto he had but tasted the bitter cup which there he drank to the very dregs. This commencement of the hour of suffering made him say in the opening of his intercessory prayer, when, as we have before shown, he entered more fully on his priestly office—"Father, the hour has come." (John 17:1) What hour was this but the hour of agonizing suffering, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and yet the hour for which he came into the world; (John 12:27) the hour of ungodly men and of the power of darkness; (Luke 22:53) the hour when the Father cried aloud, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow, says the Lord Almighty." (Zech. 13:7)

Would we, then, see, feel, and realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin, it is not by viewing the lightnings and hearing the thunders of Sinai's fiery top, but in seeing the agony and bloody sweat, and hearing the groans and cries of the suffering Son of God, as made sin for us, in the garden and upon the cross. To look upon him whom we have pierced will fill heart and eyes with godly sorrow for sin, and a holy mourning for and over a martyred, injured Lord. (Zech. 13:10) To see, by the eye of faith, as revealed to the soul by the power of God, the darling Son of God bound, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, mocked, and then, as the climax of cruel scorn and infernal cruelty, crucified between two thieves—this believing sight, this fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, will melt the hardest heart into contrition and repentance.

But when we see, by the eye of faith, that this was the smallest part of his sufferings, that there were depths of soul trouble and of intolerable distress and agony from the hand of God as a consuming fire, as of inflexible justice and righteous indignation against sin wherever and in whomever found, and that our blessed Lord had to endure the wrath of God until he was poured out like water, and his soft, tender heart in the flames of indignation became like wax, and melted within him, (Psalm, 22:14)—then we can in some measure conceive what he undertook in becoming a sin offering. For as all the sins of his people were put upon him, the wrath of God due to them fell upon him!

As when Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack, the penalty of the transgression fell upon the guilty one, who might have said, "Then I restored that which I took not away," so, when the sins of the elect were found on the head of Christ, really innocent—though by imputation guilty, justice viewed him and treated him as the guilty criminal. Separation from God, under a sense of his terrible displeasure, and that on account of sin, that abominable thing which his holy soul hates—is not this *hell*? This, then, was the hell experienced by the suffering Redeemer when the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. (Isa. 53:6) What heart can conceive or tongue express what must have been the feelings of the Redeemer's soul when he, the beloved Son of God, when he who had lain in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, he whose whole joy was in their mutual love and fellowship, whose ineffable bliss it was to be ever "by him as one brought up with him, and to be daily his delight, rejoicing always before him,"

when he, the Father's only begotten Son, was as if put away from his bosom as, by imputation, a sinner. In proportion to his love to the Father were his distress and agony at his displeasure; in proportion to his intense holiness was his grief at being treated as a transgressor.

The prophet, speaking to the afflicted Church of God, says, "For the Lord has called you back from your grief—as though you were a young wife abandoned by her husband." (Isa. 54:6) What so grievous to the spirit of a loving wife, one who had been married in all the warmth and affection of youth, as to be forsaken of her husband, and that all her advances to reconciliation should be refused? But what is her grief of spirit, what are all her deep wounds of suffering love compared to the grief of spirit felt by the Son of God when his Father, his own Father, hid his face from him? This brought into his bosom the pangs of hell; for let us ever bear in mind that there was a solemn and dreadful reality in the wrath of God as felt in the heart of Jesus. Was not the bodily suffering of the cross real? Did not the nails really pierce the tender hands and feet, while every nerve of the agonized body was wrought up to the most exquisite and excruciating height of pain? No less real, and far more severe, were the agonies of his soul, for the wrath of God in the Redeemer's heart was as real as the nails that pierced his hands and feet!

What is bodily pain compared with mental anguish? Under the heaviest bodily pain martyrs have rejoiced in the flames; but a wounded spirit who can bear? Of all trouble—soul-trouble is the heaviest; and of all soul-trouble, what is to be compared with a sense of God's wrath drinking up the very spirit, and burning in the conscience to the lowest hell? Yet the depths of this trouble—depths in which he himself as man could not have stood, but from the sustaining energy of his own indwelling Deity and the gracious support of the eternal Spirit, Jesus sustained when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. We have still several other points of the sin offering to consider, but as these contain in them much spiritual instruction, we shall defer their consideration to our next chapter, when we hope to close our meditations on the Priesthood of Jesus.

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