

There was a story in the news this week about 2 men, 2 drug dealers who were arrested in possession of 10kilos of marijuana... nothing particularly unusual you may say, but the reason this story made the news is because they actually turned themselves in...

Why? Because they made the mistake of trying out their product. As a result they were so struck with paranoia that every car they saw, they assumed it was an undercover police car.

And having tried and failed, to flag the cars down, they rang the police and asked to be arrested, which they were

... and the reason this makes the news is because the idea of turning ourselves in, pleading guilty is pretty unusual... in fact the 2 men have since admitted they were stupid to do so!

Owning up to guilt is pretty rare... much more common is the idea of not owning up, pleading 'not guilty'.

Now my guess is that, at one time or another, in one way or another, rightly or wrongly, all of us will be able to recall a time when we felt guilty

... not a drug induced paranoia... but genuine guilt, a knowing that we have done something we shouldn't or haven't done something we should...

... and so we will know, that guilt is a burden... none of us delight in feeling guilty.

So why am I starting with all this talk of guilt? Well it's because our passage from Leviticus this morning is going to take you and me on a "guilt trip"

I'm not sure if you are familiar with the phrase, but usually being taken on a guilt trip is a bad thing, where someone wants to make you feel guilty... usually so that one way or another, they then feel better about themselves or get something from you - it is a form of manipulation

Now unfortunately some of us here, may have had that experience when going to church... where the preacher is only seeking to 'guilt trip' people... the result being that you go home feeling beat up and rubbish.

But our guilt trip this morning in Leviticus is different... for the thing to understand about this trip... is that it's destination is not misery, but joy

... not burden but freedom...

... not guilt but complete forgiveness

and so if we go home this morning only feeling guilty, and not knowing how we can be forgiven, then i have failed completely and we have missed the point of this bible passage altogether!!

So just by way of context before we jump in... last week we saw that God is holy... and actually the first 7 chapters are instructions all about different offerings the Hebrew people are to make, so that they can have the Holy God continue to dwell amongst them.

And the guilt offering that we just read about... is the last one mentioned and we are going to consider what we can learn from it under 3 headings..

## **#1 - Our problem: we stand guilty before the holy God**

So our passage deals with how people who are guilty of sinning, can stand before the holy God forgiven... how that guilt can be forgiven

This idea of guilt before God, runs right throughout our passage... mentioned again and again in 5v16, 18-19, and 6v4, 6, 7

And in fact we are given 3 examples of how we can be guilty before God

so let's just run thru them quickly...

### **1. Dishonouring God**

vv14-16, begins with the phrase a 'breach of faith' -

this describes something very serious,

'a breach of faith' is the phrase used of God's people when they act unfaithfully in their relationship with him....

so it refers to relational wrong-doing

where we might talk of "breaking a promise", or "acting unfaithfully"

but what does it look like to sin, v15, against "the holy things of the Lord"

What are these holy things? well it certainly referred to taking away any objects or furniture in the temple... or any sacrifices you might bring to the temple...

But also to any objects dedicated to God... so one example is a man called Achan, we read about him in Joshua 6:18, (7:1)... where basically God said, this stuff belongs to me, but Achan stole it for himself.

... "*well that's ok*" we might say, "*because we don't have holy objects to steal, here at Westlake*"

which is true... but this 'breach of faith' term is also used for example, when King Ahaz promoted idol worship (2Chron28:19-25)

Why is that a breach of faith... well because he encouraged a "*taking the worship which is God's, and giving it to another*"

And the apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12, that for the Christian, our whole lives are to be our act of spiritual worship... to God **alone**...

so our worshipping God is not just about singing songs on a Sunday, but worshiping God with our time and resources, our whole being, every day of the week

but when we worship someone, or something else... when we give our worship to anyone other than God, we are dishonouring Him

So the point is this... if we take the things that belong to the Holy God (whether that be holy objects, or rightful worship), then we are taking from the Holy God... we are stealing from the Holy God what is rightfully His

And such a breach of faith, means that you and I incur guilt before the Lord... and this is a problem

Then in vv17-19... the issue is not so much dishonouring God as

### **2. Disobeying God**

... disobeying God's commands

But like before, do notice that **unintentional** sinning, **not deliberately** sinning, does not mean that we are **not** guilty

... 'I didn't meant to' is no excuse

I was reminded of this just recently when i picked up my first speeding ticket... it took me a little while to work out **where** it happened and then **why**... and it was down to my confusion over speed limits around motorway junctions... and so my thinking doing 110km/h was ok...

... well its not!... not when the limit is 100!

now whilst on this occasion, it was genuinely unintentional,

... 'I didn't meant to' was no excuse

... there was no denying that i was guilty of speeding, and so i had to pay the fine

And then finally, 6vv1-7...

### **3. Defrauding our neighbour**

Direct application is a bit easier here, isn't it?...

Because these verses refer to our horizontal relationships, how we relate to one another

... vv2-3 speak of guilt that comes thru deception and theft and lying... and to make things worse, swearing falsely... that is, swearing in God's name, and so very obviously taking the Lord's name in vain

thus breaking the 3rd commandment, as well as the 8th, 9th & 10th!

All these things are once again... 6v1... a "*breach of faith against the LORD*"

Our sin has both a social **and** a spiritual dimension

... our actions have consequences for both our horizontal relationships (relationships with one another) as well as vertical (our relationship with God)

And so whilst we may sin against God in different ways... the point is that when we sin, whether it be **directly** against God by disobeying Him... intentional or unintentionally...

... or we sin **indirectly** against Him, by sinning against our neighbour

... dishonouring God, disobeying God, defrauding those made in God's image...

all of this, makes us guilty before the Holy God.

Which is no small matter... it is very serious... and we know that, because this guilt requires a guilt offering... a costly sacrifice... a ram without blemish... which would be the most expensive!

Such guilt cannot simply be swept under the carpet, and ignored...

But of course, God's instructions about the guilt offering show us that our 'being guilty' is not the end of it... there is provision for forgiveness of that guilt, thru the guilt offering!!

Which is really brilliant news!

But before we move on to thinking how great it is that God makes provision for our guilt, and our right response to being guilty... it would first help to spend a moment thinking how we sometimes try and deal wrongly with our guilt...

1. **ignore** our guilt before God completely

- pretend it's not there, pretend God is not there... best way is to simply inhabit the outside world! So, stop coming to church, stop reading your bible and meeting with other christians, and move in with the actress Angelina Jolie who says "*I don't believe in guilt, I believe in living on impulse*"

... then most likely you won't ever hear talk of your guilt before God... or for that matter how you can be forgiven by God!

2. If that sounds a bit extreme then maybe just **play it down**... think it's not actually that bad... so it's not. God may disagree but at the end of the day it's all relative isn't it?

... but of course if it's not that bad... you'll never seek forgiveness

3. **blame someone else** - that speeding ticket i mentioned earlier... on receiving the letter in the post... I did what any loving husband would do... check to see if it was actually Zannah driving... look to shift the blame... a great way to deal with guilt is to put it onto someone else

4. And then finally, we can **see ourselves as the solution**... this too is a terrible mistake...

because not only does it ignore half our bible passage... it just doesn't work

... The other day I was reading Shakespeare's Macbeth... well when i say the other day, it was actually about 25 years ago!

But there is only one thing i remember from that, and it is the character Lady Macbeth, and her incessant hand washing... her trying to remove the blood from her hands... where of course the physical blood of her murdered husband had been washed... but the guilt had not... could not

... so for us... and our guilt before God Almighty...

... but whilst we cannot wash our guilt away, there is something we are called to do, which brings me to our 2nd heading...

## **#2 - our response - do all we can, where we can, to repair the damage caused**

Did you notice the language of restoration in our bible reading... 5v16

6v4,5...

Here is instruction to repair the damage caused... so whatever you stole, give it back! This is really practical stuff isn't it, and guards against the danger of thinking that when we wrong our neighbour... **all** we need to do is confess to God and think that is the end of it...

So for example... if you have borrowed a lawn mower or a book or some money - give it back!

if you have stolen something, return it.

The point is that we are to do whatever it takes, in so far as we can to put things right

This has 2 purposes...

1. restores relationships in the community - so if i stole Martin's lawn mower, no point me just saying sorry to him, but keeping the lawnmower... i need to give it back... in fact i need give him back the lawnmower plus a 5th! why that 5th? well because when i do that i am demonstrating that I am not only keen to return what was stolen, but i am looking to repair things... i am changing in my behaviour... in other words, it also ...
2. demonstrates true repentance - so i am not only feeling bad about what i have done, but i am consciously looking to turn around - to repent- and stop taking from others, and instead, begin being generous to others

... this is of course hard to do... costly to do, perhaps in terms of money, certainly in terms of swallowing our pride

... much easier just to say sorry to God and be done with it... and anyways Jesus never said this sort of thing did he?... he didn't, did he?

Look with me at Matt 5v23-24

... again the person who is in the wrong is to initiate the reparation

*"Yeah but, you cant expect a Christian to **actually** do that, it would be totally impractical, not to mention deeply humbling..."*

Well remember Zacchaeus, that short unpopular little tax collector... Luke 19v8-9

He is a great example of what it means when John the Baptist told people to ... bear fruit in keeping with repentance

Repentance is not just about remorse, but reparation - a looking to repair wrongdoing where we can, when we can

At which point we must pause and realise there is a terrible mistake we can make here... if we think that in some way our repenting and seeking to put things right... in and of itself brings forgiveness from God

... if we only feel bad enough... beat ourselves up enough... pay enough... do something costly enough.. then we will be forgiven

... that is to think of reparation, making restitution as penance - which is v different indeed!  
... and is to fall into the trap of again seeing ourselves as the solution...

There was a movie in the mid 80's— The mission - where one of the characters Mendoza, played by Robert De Niro, who having murdered his brother, is told by the priest that the way to forgiveness is thru penance

*"God gave us the burden of freedom.*

*You chose your crime.*

*Do you have the courage to choose your penance? Do you dare do that?"*

And so there is this scene where he is climbing a waterfall with a massive burden on his back , it's a huge, heavy thing containing all his his armour and swords - a constant reminder of his guilt

... visually its **very** powerful - demonstrating just how crippling our guilt can be

... theologically it's **very** wrong

... you... I... we... cannot earn our forgiveness this way

Yes **our response** is to seek reparation where we can... do all we can, when we can, to repair and damage done. But whilst we may be able to pay back the money we owe a neighbour... how could we ever pay back the debt we owe to God!

... we can't.. but as i said at the beginning, our guilt trip's final destination **IS** joy, freedom from guilt, forgiveness

How?... well that is God's business... and so brings us to our final heading...

for we are not only to turn **from** our sin... but turn **to** Jesus Christ

### **#3 - God's solution: receive forgiveness thru Jesus... THE guilt offering**

I wonder if you noticed the surprise in this passage... that even though it is God whom we stand guilty before - he is the one who provides the solution... he provides the means of forgiveness, the guilt offering

You see this passage is not to guilt-trip people, but to show them that God has made provision for forgiveness of their guilt!!

3 times in our passage (5v16b,18, 6v7) you will notice the phrase, "*and he shall be forgiven*"

How? Only thru the sacrifice of the guilt offering, the ram without blemish

If you have guilt before God and you want to be forgiven... you **can** be forgiven.. you **will** be forgiven thru the death of that ram

... atonement will be made

at-one-ment with God will be achieved

the separation... the fracturing of your relationship with the holy God because of your sin will be atoned for... we will be at-one with God... relationship restored...

... thru the guilt offering

That is the promise of the LORD who spoke to Moses here in Leviticus, and yet that ram was only a fore-shadowing of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

just as an architect's drawing is a fore-shadowing of the future reality, the building itself

so this burnt offering was a fore-shadowing of the future reality of what Jesus would achieve when he died on the cross

Let me read from

Isaiah 53vv4-6... and then v10

Do you see... Jesus is our perfect guilt offering...

it was 350 years ago when Bishop Cranmer wrote a prayer book for the church... in it he speaks of our guilt, our sin before the LORD, as

*the memory of them weighs us down,  
the burden of them is too great for us to bear.*

but this is not a cause for despair... for he then points us to the Lord Jesus and his death on the cross...

so when we share bread and wine, we remember his body and blood as our perfect guilt offering, and we give thanks and we rejoice

... and we sing with great confidence in our final song, these words...

*When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin  
Because the sinless Saviour died  
My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the Just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me*

In just a moment we will share bread and wine together, but i want to finish by reading a little bit of the christian book "A pilgrims progress", by John Bunyan

The book is about a dream where the main character is a man called Christian, who is pictured carrying a great burden on his back, its the burden of his sin, his guilt before God ... and in chapter 3 we read these words...

*I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall that was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, Christian ran, but with great difficulty because of the load on his back.*

*Christian ran till he came to a hill; upon it stood a cross, and a little below was a tomb.*

*So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the tomb, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.*

*Then said Christian with a happy heart,*

*He has given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.*

*Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the water down his cheeks.*

*Now, as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him, with Peace be to thee. So the first said to him, Thy sins be forgiven thee; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with a change of garments; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bade him look*

*on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the heavenly gate; so they went their way.  
Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on, singing:*

*This far did I come laden with my sin;  
Nor could anything ease the grief that I was in,  
Till I came here; what a place is this!  
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?*

*Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?  
Blessed cross! blessed tomb! blessed rather be  
The Man that was there put to shame for me!*