SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE; AND MINISTER OF

ST. JAMES’S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM, SURREY.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1833.

SERMON XIII.

THE SCAPE-GOAT A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Leviticus xvi. 21, 22.

*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: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.*

There were many ordinances under the Mosaic dispensation which seem to have had a very slight reference to the gospel; at least, they were such imperfect and dark shadows of its blessings, that we find it difficult even now to trace the re­semblance. The ordinance mentioned in the text was not however of this kind. It directs us at once to the Lord Jesus Christ, and is so plain and comprehensive in its application to him, that it appears to have been written to explain to us, as well as to prefigure to the Jews, the method of salvation through his blood. We may perhaps obtain a correct idea of it, by considering, first, the typical sacrifice it enjoined; secondly, the con­duct which the high priest was commanded to ob­serve with respect to it; and, thirdly, the benefits resulting from his obedience to this command.

I. We are to consider, first, *the typical sacrifice which is here enjoined.* It was a live goat. But we must not look at this living sacrifice alone. By referring to the fifth verse of this chapter, we find that there was another goat set apart at the same time, which was slain as a sin-offering before the Lord, and the blood of which was carried within the veil, and sprinkled in the usual manner on the mercy-seat. Both these animals were therefore to be considered by the Jews as joint objects of their faith. They were in fact but one sacrifice, or different parts of the same ordinance; the one, which was offered up as a victim, prefiguring the death of Christ, and the other, which was sent away alive, alluding perhaps to his resurrection and ascension.

1. As we contemplate this typical sacrifice, we may observe, first, that *it was appointed by God.*

Aaron was not allowed to take any animal that he pleased, as a victim on this occasion. He was particularly commanded to take two kids of the goats, and every part of the ceremony connected with the offering of them was enjoined by God. Why these animals were selected we know not; but it is of importance to observe that they were selected by God, and that no others would have been accepted by him in their stead.

Thus was Christ, the great sacrifice, set apart by God himself as a sin-offering for his guilty people. No sooner had the violated law condemned them, than he sought for them a Saviour, and found him in the Partner of his throne. Passing by the angels “that excel in strength,” he laid help upon one mightier than all their host, and proclaimed his eternal Son the Redeemer of our world. Yea, his amazing love provided a ransom before there was a sinner on earth to need it. In eternity a Saviour was chosen for us. “Ye were not redeemed,” says Saint Peter, “with corrup­tible things, as silver and gold, but with the pre­cious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without ble­mish and without spot, who verily was fore-or­dained before the foundation of the world.” Hence when the Lord Jesus Christ cometh into the world to take on him the office to which his Father had appointed him, he says, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.” “Well pleased no more with the burnt offer­ings of thine offending creatures, taking no bullock out of their house nor he-goat out of their fold, thou hast turned their eyes and hopes to a nobler victim; thou hast appointed me to become the sinner’s substitute, and hast prepared for me a mortal nature, that I may be made a curse and die in the sinner’s stead.” If therefore the great atonement for our sins was thus provided for us by the very Being against whom our sins were committed, it follows that it is an atonement fully equal to our guilt; a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice; an oblation which satisfies the unbending law and even the infinitely holy mind of the great Jehovah, which leaves justice nothing to ask for, and the redeemed sinner nothing to dread.

2. There is another remark closely connected with this, to be inferred from the text—*The efficacy of the sacrifice enjoined in it must be traced to the divine appointment.*

One goat was slain and the other was sent into the wilderness, and then all the iniquities of the children of Israel were pardoned; but they were not pardoned on account of any virtue that dwelt in these animals. The blood of bulls and of goats had no more power then to take away sin, than it has now. Had not God enjoined these rites, they would undoubtedly have incensed rather than ap­peased him. Aaron might have brought into his sanctuary the blood of ten thousand victims, but, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacri­fices unto me?” would have been the language of the Lord. “When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts?” But this was the way in which the Israelites were commanded to seek pardon, and, through these means, a God of mercy, having re­spect to the mediatorial work of his dear Son, was pleased to dispense it.

It is thus with all ordinances and means of grace. We are prone to look upon them as the fountains of the mercy we receive, rather than as the channels through which mercy is conveyed to us; but in themselves they are utterly powerless. They have no virtue whatsoever but what they derive from the divine appointment, and from the influence of the Holy Spirit working by them and with them. God has ordained them; he there­fore blesses them, and makes them effectual to the conversion and sanctification of our souls.

And it is the same too, in a limited sense, with the sacrifice of Christ. We must trace its sove­reign virtue to the appointment of him “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” There is a propriety in this stupendous sacrifice, a magnificence and glory which cast into the shade every other display of Jehovah’s great­ness; the Christian sees something of this pro­priety and glory now, and he will see much more of them soon; but he does not ground his hopes of salvation solely or chiefly on them. He looks for pardon through Christ, because “God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,” and has commanded the guilty and perishing to look to him and be saved. He builds his hopes of heaven on his crucified Lord, because he knows that God has laid him “in Zion for a foundation, a chief corner-stone, elect and pre­cious, a sure foundation.”

II. It appears then that the sacrifice here en­joined was of divine appointment, and that it owed its efficacy to this circumstance. Let us now proceed to consider, secondly, *the conduct which Aaron was commanded to observe with respect to it.*

The mere appointment of these two animals as a sin-offering was not sufficient to atone for the transgressions of the Israelites: the one must be slain as a victim, and the other must be presented before the Lord and have a particular ceremony performed over it, before Israel can be pardoned.

1. A part of this ceremony consisted in *the con­fession of guilt.* This confession generally preceded every sacrifice, and as soon as the high priest had pronounced it, all the priests and people around him bowed, and fell down on their faces, and worshipped God. But on this occasion it was to be made with peculiar exactness. It is not said that Aaron shall confess over the goat the iniqui­ties of the children of Israel, but “*all* their ini­quities,” and “*all* their transgressions in *all* their sins.” We are thus reminded that a general con­fession of sin is not all that is required of us. We are called on to be very earnest in our efforts to become acquainted with the full extent of our depravity; to be often looking into our hearts and reviewing our lives, and to be particular and minute in acknowledging the sins which we disco­ver there.

But who can count the number of our trans­gressions, or estimate their guilt? None but God. Thousands of the sins which we were conscious of when they were committed, have been long since forgotten; and ten thousand more have been added to their number, which we have never thought of: and yet a holy God numbers them all. The book of his remembrance stands open every moment before his face, and in that book are all our transgressions written. Even now he is set­ting our misdeeds before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance. This is a serious re­flection; but if it really makes us serious and pray­erful, the scripture before us is calculated to inspire us with hope, rather than to disquiet us with fear.

2. It tells us that the high priest, after having confessed over the goat the sins of the people, was *to transfer them to the victim before him;* he was to put them on its head; thus intimating that their guilt, as far as their liability to punishment was included in it, no longer rested on the Is­raelites, but on the devoted animal on whom his hands were laid.

The spiritual meaning of this part of the ceremony is plain. It was designed to teach us figuratively the same blessed truth which has now been re­vealed to us without a figure, and which consti­tutes the substance and glory of the gospel, that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;” that “he bare our sins in his own body on the tree;” that the Lord hath laid on his eternal Son “the iniquities of us all;” and that every transgressor who by a lively faith casts the burden of his guilt on him, has no more punishment to fear in an eternal world on account of it, than as though he had never sin­ned. “God made him to be sin for us,” says the apostle, “that we might be made the righteous­ness of God in him.” Not that he really regarded him as a sinner, for “he knew no sin;” he was as “holy, and harmless, and undefiled,” when bleed­ing on the cross, as when reigning on his throne; but looking on him as the willing substitute of his polluted church, his Father treated him as though all their guilt really rested on him, and poured out on his head the vials of his wrath. And this was the wondrous plan, which infinite love prompted infinite wisdom to devise and infinite power to execute, for the display of mercy to our fallen world. And this is the only way by which any of our race can be restored to Jehovah’s favour. Confessing and deploring our sins, we must bring them all to the cross of Christ, esteeming none so small as to admit of being atoned for by ourselves, and none too great to be transferred to him. We must stand before the mercy-seat with our hands on the head of this Victim, and this prayer in our hearts, “O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.”

From this part of our subject we may deduce two inferences. The first is this—*Repentance cannot expiate sin.* The Israelites are here called on to make a public and particular acknowledg­ment of their guilt, but before it can be pardoned, a sacrifice must be offered*; one* goat must be slain, and another sent into a distant wilderness.

Of what avail then are confessions, and prayers, and tears? In themselves they are of none. How­ever sincere and bitter, they can no more recom­pense the injured honour or regain the forfeited favour of an insulted God, than the debtor’s sor­row can discharge the debt which he has con­tracted, or the trembling of the condemned crimi­nal repeal his sentence. While trusting in such miserable saviours as these, our sins, in the midst of our repentance, are still upon us, and when we die, they will sink us to destruction. Repentance is necessary; we cannot be pardoned without it; but why is it necessary? Because without it we shall never seek pardon, and in­deed never be conscious of our need of it. It is wrought in the heart of the sinner, not to furnish him with any ground of confidence before God, but to destroy the natural pride of his soul;to convince him who once imagined himself “rich and in need of nothing,” that “he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” in need of every thing; to make him willing to submit to the humiliating terms of the gospel, and thankful for the precious blessings which the gospel offers him. It is as necessary to salvation, as the knowledge of his disease is necessary to the recovery of him who is sick; as becoming a pardoned sinner, as humiliation before his sove­reign is becoming a reprieved rebel.

Hence we may infer that *the sacrifice of Christ does not supersede the necessity of repentance.*

There are however some professors of the gos­pel, who contend that the pardoned sinner has no longer any need to mourn over his transgres­sions; that he may even forget them; nay, that he dishonours the Saviour who bled for him, if he suffers them to excite any sorrow in his heart, or even to occupy his thoughts. But what can such men know of the nature of true religion? What can they have felt of its power? There are some errors which may continue to hold their place in the mind after divine grace has enlightened and sanctified it, for there is nothing in them directly opposed to the experience of the renewed heart; but there are other errors which must give way before the influence of real religion, and this is one of them. The man who is a Christian in­deed, knows and feels that an application to Christ for pardon, so far from destroying the workings of contrition, is the most powerful of all means to cherish and increase them. All the ter­rors of the law and all its threatenings of wrath, are powerless in comparison with it. They can make a sinner tremble, but this can make him weep, and pray, and love. The believing sinner will ever be a penitent sinner. While with Mary he loves and boldly confesses a pardoning Jesus, with her, were he able, he would kiss his feet and wash them with his tears. Before the foundations of the world were laid, faith and repentance were connected together in the everlasting covenant of grace, and that man will be disappointed and un­done, who attempts to separate them.

III. Let us now go on to consider, lastly, *the benefits which resulted from Aaron’s obedience to the injunctions here given him.*

1. After the appointed confession had been made over it, and the sins of the people put upon its head, the goat was to be sent away into an uninhabited wilderness. “He shall send him away,” says the text, “by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness, and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities.”

Here again we can be at no loss to discover the spiritual import of the rite. This part of it was undoubtedly designed to show us *the completeness, the fulness, of that pardon of sin, which Christ has purchased by the sacrifice of himself for the believing sinner.* It is a pardon extend­ing, not to a few iniquities, but to all. As “all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,” were borne away by the goat far from them and heard of no more, so, we are told, “the Lamb of God taketh or beareth away the sins of the world;” so “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;” so “they who believe, are justified from all things.” The fact is, that the moment a sin­ner comes with a believing heart to the Saviour, and casts on him the burden of his guilt, in that moment his sins are all blotted out, all cancelled; so that he who was before condemned and accurs­ed, is now acquitted and blessed. He is “in Christ Jesus,” and “there is now no condemna­tion” for him. He deserves condemnation as much as ever he deserved it, but the sentence has been revoked and the criminal is free. “In those days and in that time,” saith the Lord, “the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”

Hence we may infer that justification is not, like sanctification, a gradual work, a work remain­ing to be completed; it is already finished. As far as regards the eternal consequences of sin, the par­don of the Christian is as complete when he is first united to his Redeemer, as his soul can wish it or divine mercy make it.

And hence we may infer also that no contrite sinner has any need to despair on account of the number or greatness of his transgressions. One unrepented and beloved sin is sufficient to ruin the soul, but ten thousand hated and bewailed sins have no power to destroy it. The most hei­nous transgressor who applies to a dying Saviour for mercy, is pardoned as readily, as freely, and as fully, as he whose offences are comparatively few and light. The least guilty are not received by God on the ground of merit, nor are the most guilty rejected on the ground of unworthi­ness. It is not the greatness of our iniquity, which will exclude us from pardon, but the great­ness of our insensibility and the obstinacy of our unbelief.

2. But *the pardon which the believing penitent receives through Christ, is an everlasting, as well as a complete pardon.* This is strongly implied in the text. The goat was not only to bear away all the iniquities of the children of Israel, but it was to bear them away into “a wilderness,” into “a land not inhabited;” a land cut off from all other countries; a desolate, unvisited, and almost inac­cessible region, in which the devoted animal was to be let go, and where it would remain unseen and forgotten till it perished. The Israelites therefore had not only the assurance that all their past iniquities were pardoned, but they were taught also by this ordinance, that they had no reason to fear the return of them, the revoking of this pardon. And the spiritual Israel also are taught by it the same encouraging lesson. The redemption which they obtain by the blood of Jesus, is an “eternal redemption.” The pardon connected with it is not a mere respite for a sea­son, it is an eternal acquittal; an act of oblivion, which, once passed, will never be recalled; one of those gifts of God, which are without repentance. It makes an everlasting separation between the sinner and the wrath of God; it forms an ever­lasting connection between him and heaven.

The inspired writers employ the boldest and most expressive figures to convince the despond­ing penitent of this truth. They even represent the all-wise God as forgetting, as absolutely ceasing to think of, the iniquities of his people. “I,” he says by his prophet Isaiah, “even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” “As far as the east is from the west,” says David, “so far hath he removed our transgressions from us;” so that they can no more come near the soul to destroy it, than the east and the west, the most opposite parts of the heavens, can meet. “Who is a God like unto thee,” asks the prophet Micah, “that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Such is the spiritual import of the ordinance enjoined in the text. The consideration of it ought to impress upon us the necessity of a per­sonal and immediate application to Christ, as the great Saviour of sinners. It calls upon us to be­lieve in him, not merely as a holy and exalted Being and a compassionate and almighty Friend, but as the Lamb of God, the great sacrifice for sin, the only channel through which mercy can flow to our perishing souls. It is not enough that this sacrifice has been offered on the altar, that the Son of God has been wounded and bruised for our iniquities; we ourselves must ap­proach this blessed Scape-Goat, confess our sins over him, and trust in him to take them all away. Now have you done this? Are you doing it daily? Are you often acknowledging and be­wailing your manifold sins and wickedness, which you have most grievously committed? Is the remembrance of them at seasons grievous unto you, and the burden of them intolerable? With­out this consciousness of guilt and sorrow of heart on account of it, the remedy which God has provided, will be useless to you; you will not, you cannot, avail yourselves of it. As far as you are concerned, “Christ is dead in vain.”

But if you are really humbled on account of your unworthiness, on what are you grounding your expectations of pardon? This great ques­tion still remains to be decided, and on this depends more than your liveliest hopes and fears can conceive. Eternity, with all its unsearchable sorrows and joys, is involved in it. Heaven and hell are involved in this one question—Am I trusting for the pardon of my sins in the blood of Christ? While thousands around me are seeking comfort to their troubled hearts from their own miserable righteousness, from the prayers they have offered, the sacraments they have attended, the feelings they have experienced, the doctrines they have upheld, the tears they have shed, am I putting all my trust in that great sacrifice for sin which was offered on the cross? Am I venturing on it for salvation; relying upon it; fully con­vinced that I must perish, if it does not save me, and equally convinced that as long as I rely on it I cannot perish, for that it will save me? If such be the ground of your confidence, brethren, and you hold it steadfast unto the end, there is not a creature in the universe, whose condition is safer than yours, not one whose happiness will in the end be greater. You know in whom you have believed, but you know not the extent of his mer­cy, the riches of his grace, the exceeding great­ness of his salvation. Seek therefore a deeper and livelier sense of the importance of the cross, clearer and more extensive views of the covenant of grace established on it, a firmer faith in its power. Strive to live more under its elevating, cheering, sanctifying influence. Much as the doctrines connected with it have been misrepre­sented and hated by a proud and ignorant world, they are the only doctrines which can make the world either holy or happy; the only remedies of the evils which defile us; the only refuges under the calamities which afflict us the only means of escape from the miseries which threaten us. O may the peace which flows from them, be shed abroad more abundantly in our hearts! May their constraining power be more visible in our lives! Amidst the reproaches which assail us, may we still glory meekly, yet boldly, in the cross of Jesus Christ; and under all our troubles and perplexities, may this be the reasoning which we employ to silence our fears and to comfort our hearts, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.”