

3/11/12

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. The text is the Old Testament Lesson, Lv 16:8-10 and 21-22. and I'll read it again it a moment.

Sometimes, and sometimes when you need God's presence most, a Christian can feel all alone. Sometimes, it can feel as though God has abandoned you. And sometimes it can seem only fair that He would. In Gethsemane, His disciples abandoned Him to save their lives. But *we* can abandon Him, too, whenever we're supposed to be with Him in new life and serving other people right by His side, and He said, "Are you with Me?" Then we can abandon Him, and have, and not even to save our lives, but just to save our leisure time, to save our private pleasures, to save our wallets. We're Christians now. By God, we can WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT and still we know how we can loiter in the dark.

It'd only be fair if He left us in the dark. And we know that, too. Because what's fair is WRITTEN ON our conscience. That's how come, even when the Holy Spirit is calling us to repent, to just drop whatever sin and be *free* of it – just like that – sometimes it just doesn't sound fair. And when Satan says, "It *isn't* fair. You've gone too far and too many times," then Christians can wonder, "Has God left me now for good?" Because if I've told the Lord, "Not now. Later. Some other time." Maybe not in words, but in my actions, if I've told Him, "Leave me alone," it's only fair that He would.

And what's happening is that we're hearing Satan and our own conscience quote God's Law, which actually does say, WHEN THEY FORSAKE ME, I WILL FORSAKE THEM. Quote: THEY HAVE ABANDONED THE LORD ... AND TURNED THEIR BACKS ON HIM. ... THEREFORE HE HAS ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE. It's only fair. For people who back off from the LIGHT, there's OUTER DARKNESS. And God has told people who live, when it comes down to it, not for Him, but for some other thing, YOU HAVE FORSAKEN ME FOR *OTHER* GODS, SO I WILL NO LONGER SAVE YOU. IT IS NOT THAT MY ARM HAS GROWN SHORT SO THAT I CANNOT, BUT BECAUSE YOUR SINS HAVE MADE A SEPARATION BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR GOD. And if death finds us like that, we really will be abandoned. If He finds us like that when He comes, He says Himself, "You WILL STAND OUTSIDE, KNOCKING AND PLEADING, "LORD, OPEN THE DOOR." BUT HE WILL ANSWER, "I DON'T KNOW YOU. GO AWAY." Damnation is only fair.

What's not fair is a SCAPEGOAT. You know that all the old sacrifices that God commanded as pictures of the sacrifice that He was going to make – all of those old sacrifices were unfair. Because, in a way, *all* those innocent animals dying for things

they never did – they were all scapegoats, and it wasn't fair, but they died by the thousands, all the same, to ATONE, which means, to cover the sins of God's People. Of course, an animal can't really cover for a human being. They were all just stop gaps and pictures until something died that was way more innocent than they. It's a comfort to realize that at least they all died more quickly than they would have in nature – death in the wild is nasty. They all died quickly and humanely. Except for one. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, one innocent thing died very slowly. It was really, really unfair.

He said, Lv 16:8] TAKE TWO GOATS AND PRESENT THEM BEFORE THE LORD ... ONE TO BE FOR THE LORD AND ONE TO BE THE SCAPEGOAT. The first goat, like all the other sacrifices, just died quick and clean, to show that THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH and to give a picture of something dying for you. But fair pay for SIN is more than physical death. What's fair is also SEPARATION from God, locked out and weeping in OUTER DARKNESS, abandoned by God to the thing that's waiting in the dark. The WAGES OF SIN are also damnation. That's what the *second* GOAT was about.

V. 10] THE GOAT CHOSEN BY LOT AS THE SCAPEGOAT SHALL BE PRESENTED ALIVE TO THE LORD TO BE USED TO MAKE ATONEMENT. And here follows a symbolic ritual that could make your blood run cold. God said, V. 21] LAY BOTH HANDS ON THE HEAD OF that LIVE GOAT AND CONFESS OVER IT ALL THE WICKEDNESS AND REBELLION OF THE ISRAELITES – ALL THEIR SINS – AND PUT THEM ON THE GOAT'S HEAD. That's why it's called a SCAPEGOAT; that's where we get the word. And, it says, SEND that GOAT AWAY. SEND that GOAT AWAY INTO THE DESERT IN THE CARE OF A MAN APPOINTED FOR THE TASK. V. 22] THE GOAT WILL CARRY ALL THEIR SINS ON ITSELF TO A SOLITARY PLACE; AND THE MAN SHALL ABANDON IT IN THE DESERT.

It was a herd animal. It had never been alone before. And it was a domestic animal. All its life, humans had been there; humans had fed it, watered it, protected it. And then suddenly, one human takes it out in the desert alone, way out, where it can't possibly find its way back. And then the human ABANDONS it there. And if it tries to follow, bleating, the human won't let it come, as if it were this ball of evil – “GO AWAY!” And when the human leaves, no matter how it bleats, nobody comes. And it doesn't know why. It's abandoned while it's still alive. It took some time for it to die.

Because God wanted to keep the guilty ones, their SCAPEGOAT was ABANDONED IN THE DESET IN A SOLITARY PLACE. There was no water. And Jesus said, I AM THIRSTY. How long would it take that goat to die of thirst? Except

that, of course, when night fell and THE SCAPEGOAT was left alone in the DARK – DARKNESS FELL OVER THE LAND FROM NOON TO THREE, AND JESUS said, “MY GOD!” When the SCAPEGOAT was left alone out there in the dark, something would hear it bleating: something would come. When it got dark, some predator would come. Jesus said, THIS IS YOUR HOUR AND THE POWER OF DARKNESS. It was not an easy death for the SCAPEGOAT. And it was very unfair.

Of course, that *animal* would have died sooner or later, however well it was cared for. Not like Christ, who never had to die at all. And that goat wasn't – thank Heaven – the ritual did not require leaving that goat out there nailed through its legs to a wooden beam. Not like Christ, who was left nailed to a wooden beam when the One CHOSEN BY His Father AS THE SCAPEGOAT WAS PRESENTED ALIVE TO THE LORD TO BE USED TO MAKE ATONEMENT. When THE LORD LAID ON HIM ALL THE WICKEDNESS AND REBELLION of us all and abandoned Him, as if He were this ball of evil. He took not only our death, but our damnation while He was still alive and crucified.

Because the Law says, WHEN THEY FORSAKE ME, I WILL FORSAKE THEM. But amazing grace says, WHEN THEY FORSAKE ME, I WILL FORSAKE My Son whom I love. Amazing grace says, THEY HAVE ABANDONED THE LORD THEREFORE HE HAS ABANDONED HIS Chosen One in their place. As we sing, “Go forth, My Son,” the Father says, “and *free* them from the fear of death, from guilt and condemnation.” They HAVE FORSAKEN ME FOR *OTHER* GODS, SO I WILL not SAVE YOU. IT IS NOT THAT MY ARM HAS GROWN SHORT SO THAT I CANNOT. BUT BECAUSE their SINS will make A SEPARATION BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR GOD. And YOU WILL STAND OUTSIDE, KNOCKING AND PLEADING, “LORD, OPEN THE DOOR.” BUT I WILL ANSWER, “I DON'T KNOW YOU. GO AWAY.”

Christ had never been alone before. He said, MY FATHER IS ALWAYS WITH ME, until His Father led Him out to a SOLITARY PLACE outside the city wall, and left Him there alone. And it's no wonder that the sky went dark at noon. The wonder is that creation didn't disintegrate when God was somehow separated from God for Man's sake, when Jesus was abandoned, when Jesus was damned while He was still alive.

Because God wanted to keep us, He abandoned our SCAPEGOAT to OUTER DARKNESS on the cross, and left Him lost and bleating, left Jesus locked out and PLEADING, "MY GOD! MY GOD!" That's the sound of the SCAPEGOAT bleating in the dark. BEHOLD WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US, what kind of love that kept a Father's back against the door and made Him tell His Son

for our sake, "I DON'T KNOW YOU," while Christ cried out in a loud voice, MY GOD! MY GOD! WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

How could He not know? When God became a Man, He didn't cheat. When God took Man's sin, God took Man's Hell. And when He went through Hell on Calvary, He went through it with all the panic, terror, and despair of a man in Hell until His mind broke. He was still alive, only because He was still God. Only because He was A WORM, NOT A MAN but still God, He endured the unspeakable in three hours.

"Who can fathom that descending?" "From depths beyond our knowing, from His great heart is flowing sigh after sigh of agony" until He'd covered all the sins of Man. And then He said, IT IS FINISHED. The SEPARATION is cleared away! FATHER! INTO YOUR HANDS!" And into His Father's hands He went.

We know we *ought* to be abandoned; we may *feel* that we *are* abandoned, but that's impossible for THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. Why? Because God will *never be separated from His Son again*, which means that God will *never* be separated from anyone who's with His Son. I know we wander. And I know what the Law of God says. But the Law is not for a broken heart. The Law is not for anybody who wants to come Home. To them, amazing grace says, IF WE ARE UNFAITHFUL, *HE REMAINS FAITHFUL*. Because IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN ALL HAVE DIED and IF ONE was abandoned FOR ALL, THEN ALL HAVE *BEEN* abandoned. And God says, "Never again!"

Christ said, "FATHER! INTO YOUR HANDS!" and God gathered in our SCAPEGOAT into PARADISE, and told Him what He tells every lost child of Man in Him: FOR A BRIEF MOMENT I ABANDONED YOU, BUT WITH EVERLASTING COMPASSION I WILL GATHER YOU. If you fall, I will lift you. If you wander, I will find you. As long as you live, TO WHOEVER KNOCKS, *IT SHALL BE OPENED*. Because we have an Almighty SCAPEGOAT in Heaven. And if it's just now finally dawning on anybody how wildly unfair that is, so that you feel like you just can't take advantage of Him like that, fine: *You* explain to Christ the Lord that He really mustn't love you. *You* change God's mind about never letting you go. No. You tell the Law and your conscience and the devil, too, "I hear you. I hear you. But it's also only fair that Christ should get whatever He wants and He says that's *me*, body and soul. And God the Father really ought to have what He sacrificed so much for, and *that's* me, now and forever." Tell the Lord, "MY GOD, MY GOD, here I am. And MY GOD, MY GOD, You will never abandon me." Amen.