

The lion might be the king of the jungle. The rooster might be the king of the farm, and the dolphin might be the king of the sea. But on one day in the Jewish calendar, the lowly goat was king.

It was a special day, an extraordinary day, the holiest of days, a day of days. Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. It was that one day of the year when the high priest would go through the curtain into the Most Holy Place, that most sacred place of God's presence on earth.

And that meant two male goats, the same age, would take center stage. Two goats stood before the high priest and the guilty sons of Israel. Lots would be drawn, and one would be the Lord's goat. He'd be slaughtered as a sin offering for the people. The other one would be the scapegoat. He'd escape, but not before the high priest pressed his bloody hands down on his head, confessed all the sins of the Israelites, and then had him led away. According to Jewish tradition, a cloth was tied to the horns of the scapegoat containing the sins of the tribes. The scapegoat was led out of the Tabernacle, past the tents of the people, out of the encampment and released into the wilderness. The Hebrew word for scapegoat is azazel, combining two words, "goat" and "depart".

What a picture of how God deals with your sin. What a picture of how God is gracious and merciful toward sinners. Through the death of a goat, God shows me how He atones for your sin. Then, through the scapegoat, He shows you what He does with your sin—He takes it away, never to be remembered, like a goat trotting out into no man's land. "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

But it's one thing to be a picture or symbol of something, and it's a whole other thing to be the reality. And Hebrews 10:4 puts it this way: "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

In the other words, the blood of goats gives you no cover on Judgment Day. The blood of goats means nothing is taken away, nothing is forgotten. All your goat-like sins would just remain on you and cry out for punishment and separation from God forever. It would mean that your stubborn goat-like refusal to drop your grudges will come back to bite you. It would mean that your stubborn goat-like insistence on being served, rather than serving others, and your lack of love will never be forgotten. Not all the blood of goats takes away your stubborn unbelief, your goat-like refusal to love and trust God above all things.

But today, you heard of another special day, an extraordinary day, the holiest of days, a day of days. The Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. Good Friday. And sure enough, two male goats took center stage.

One was a real goat. His name was "Barabbas," which means, "son of the Father." But he wasn't a son a Father could be proud of. He was in prison for rebellion, murder, and theft. The other "goat" was also a "Son of the Father." But the other "goat" was no goat at all. He was a perfect Son, who brought nothing but delight and joy to His Father. He was the obedient Lamb of God. But there He was dressed up like a goat, covered and bearing all your big, hairy sins.

Two goats before Pilate. Barabbas and Jesus. Man and Jesus. You and Jesus. But for God to get the blood that atones and takes away sin, one "goat" must take center stage. One "goat"

must do both things—die for sins, and then remove them from God’s sight forever. “Behold, Jesus, the goat of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The one Goat that the Lord selected to be slaughtered for sins He didn’t commit, and then carry them out of God’s sight forever, as He is forsaken by His Father, that sinners might be received as God’s precious lambs.

But this whole story tonight, sends chills down our spines. How could they save a murderer? How could they want to set free a Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Timothy McVeigh, a Ted Bundy, a Barabbas but condemn Jesus? Barabbas should have been the one sentenced to die! The Jews should have been the ones sentenced to die! Pilate should have been the one sentenced to die! We should have been the ones sentenced to die!

An interesting question I often ask is: Who was responsible for Jesus’ death? Some say the Jews since they hatched the plot. Some say Pilate since he sentenced him to die. Some say it was the Roman Soldiers. But the answer is: All of us. We all are responsible for Jesus’ death because all of us are sinners. With our worldly, American sense of “fairness” we often point our fingers to the real “bad guys” of this world. We scoff at murderers like Jeffrey Dahmer, Osama bin Laden, or even the innocent yet presumed guilty like Casey Anthony and O.J. Simpson. We turn our heads in disgust from big business and political crooks like Martha Stewart or Rod Blagojevich. We shame famous adulterers like Tiger Woods, Dan Marino who was found to have a baby on the side, or NFL player Antonio Cromartie who has had 10 children with eight different mothers. “Yes, these are the real sinners of the world,” we think.

But Jesus tells us that anyone who hates is a murderer like Barabbas. Anyone who is greedy is a thief like Rod Blagojevich. Anyone who lusts is an adulterer like Tiger Woods. Anyone who lies is speaking the native language of the devil, whom Jesus calls the father of lies. God says, “The wages of sin is death.” Not just lots of sins. Not just big sins. Any sin. Every sin is a bad sin. Every sin earns death. Every sinner deserves death. Barabbas wasn’t the only sinner who deserved to die instead of Jesus. We do too.

But look at the love of Jesus. Would you have been willing to barge in on the Ted Bundy trial, run up to the judge and say, “No! Don’t imprison him forever! Don’t sentence him to die! Even though he slaughtered more than 30 women and did disgusting things with the dead bodies, punish me instead! Put me in the electric chair!” Would you have done that for Ted Bundy? Jeffrey Dahmer? Saddam Hussain? Barabbas? Jesus did that for you. Jesus is the faithful Son of the heavenly Father, whose faithfulness has been credited to you. He is no lowly goat; He is God’s royal Son, from God’s royal tribe. The Lion of the tribe of Judah. Yet to release you from the bondage of sins and death, He became for you like a lowly goat, so that you might be exalted, and reign with Him forever.

A lion might show his kingly glory by roaring. The rooster might show his glory by strutting. The dolphin might show his glory by swimming. But the King of kings sent from heaven for us shows His glory by dying on a cross and rising again to forever be our Crucified King.

Amen.