

"A Clean Conscience"

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Hello Everyone...I am so happy to be here this morning and to have the chance to share with you some of what the Lord has been doing in me over the past few months...I'm going to take you on a journey with me down Priesthood Lane :) ...What I mean is, I'm going to try to describe for you something about the priesthood that's been looming large in my heart lately...And the reason I'm so excited to share what I've been seeing with you is not only because I have completely fallen in love with it, but because more and more I'm seeing the realities expressed through the Old Testament priesthood are clues to the way we must come to know Christ AND each other...

The Priesthood is this beautiful, all-encompassing Reality of our Life in Christ-- it covers, it removes, it glorifies, it frees, it beautifies, it grows-- and as such, it's imperative that we each come to see it for ourselves...The bible says we've been made into a kingdom of priests and the little I've seen of this has got me wanting to see more of what that means.

When Jason was here in December, he talked about the Priesthood, the Kingdom of God, Melchizedek and the "What" and the "Why"...Remember? Well my heart saw just enough of what he said to get me to start reading through the book of Exodus on my own...Some days I'd read a little, some days a lot...Sometimes I'd see something interesting, sometimes I wouldn't...But I just kept reading, and looking and taking my time....

And to get us started this morning, I want to tell you a little story about something that happened to me one morning when I was reading Exodus...I'm telling it to you because I know how easy it is to forget who He is and who we are and what He's done...and because when I read it, it helped me turn my heart to see Him.

One Saturday morning I woke up feeling slightly distracted inside and far from the Lord. I'd been thinking about how different things seem to be recently at MSF....It feels like so much has changed-- and the changes I saw were things I didn't really like!

And the more I considered everything, the more frustration I felt....You see, I wanted the Lord to make things better! Which to my mind meant I wanted Him to either whip us all into shape or at least put things back into more comfortable, familiar territory... or if He didn't want to do either of those things, I wanted Him to at least fix me so that I didn't care about it anymore! :)

Hope it's ok to tell you that... I mean, I figure if I've been thinking that way, perhaps some of you are too...

So like I said, it was a Saturday and I didn't have to work and I had a nice fat list of things to do ahead of me..... I was feeling a little spiritually off but I decided I'd just kind of ignore it and get ready for the day. I put my make-up on, did my hair, got dressed, put on some jewelry, splashed myself with perfume and took a look at my to-do list. Then this little thought crossed my mind: "Julie, you should really read your bible before you do anything else." After all, I had the time, you know?

Now I didn't really feel like reading my bible because I wasn't feeling very "spiritual" and I didn't think I'd see anything in it anyway, since I wasn't "in the mood"...But I didn't want to feel guilty about it either, so I sat down and flipped to Exodus 33 and started reading right where I'd left off...I think I figured I'd give the Lord a few minutes, just so I could say I tried, and then I'd go on about my day.

And here's what I read: Now it was after the Golden Calf incident- Exodus 32-ish...after Moses had broken the tablets when he was mad at the children of Israel for not keeping the covenant...but Moses begged God to forgive them or blot his own name out of the book of life...And God responded to Moses by saying He'd send His Angel before them to go with them into the Land...He wasn't going to *forget* about their wrong-doing because He also said "in the day of punishment, I will punish their sin"...And then God instructed them all to depart from that place and go up to the land which He gave to them....

And in verse 3 of Ex 33 God said "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people. And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned and no one put on his ornaments." Verse 5 says "For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you.' "

"So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb. Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp."

And the phrase "take off your ornaments" kind of came alive and shook me, maybe because I'd just spent the last hour "putting on my ornaments" in an attempt to dress myself up and ignore what was going on in my heart. But suddenly I knew I wasn't fooling Him and that just like He saw the children of Israel for who they were, He saw my heart-- my flesh-- my sin nature-- my attitude-- whatever--- for what it was...And suddenly I saw myself through His eyes and I saw that there would never be enough jewelry or perfume to make my flesh acceptable to God...

And I remembered where it says in Hebrews that "the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit; and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

And I know this is a spiritual encounter with the Lord, the Truth, that has to happen in us and not just a fleshy disgust with ourselves or something, but I seeing the weakness of my flesh in that way that made me want nothing more than to be rid of it forever...It was like I saw how trapped I was by it and how desperately I needed a way of escape...

God said He wanted to see the children of Israel without their ornaments "so He would know what to do with them." And do you know what He did when He saw them uncovered like that? He had Moses set up a place outside the camp. Ex 33: 7 says that Moses moved his tent outside the camp and God would meet with him there...

Well when I read that I saw such mercy and love in those words because God

separated Himself from them, but He still wanted a place to meet with them. It wasn't like He abandoned His original plan or anything....When Moses moved his tent, an actual physical separation was established between the flesh in the camp and God, and if Moses wanted to meet with God, he would now have to leave the camp and go out to his tent...And it says all the people would stand in the doorway of their own tents and watch him go... and then a cloud would cover the door of Moses' tent and they'd know the Lord was meeting with him there and talking to him.....And from then on, anyone who wanted to seek the Lord would have to go outside the camp to the tent of meeting, and find God there....

Now I'm sure there are so many details in that story that I haven't seen or understood yet, but through it, the Lord still spoke volumes to my heart that day...There is no secret place in our hearts that God can't see. We can fool ourselves and other people, but not Him...We can try to "dress ourselves up" by doing things we think will please Him and because we can't tell the difference, we think He can't either. That's what the children of Israel did with the Golden Calf...They thought they were worshiping God...They gave Him their best-- their gold-- and created an image of God according that matched their ideas about Him...And they were thrilled with what they'd created and sang and danced and "worshipped" that god BECAUSE they really thought it was the God of Israel...but it wasn't the God of Israel, was it?

God wants to reveal who He is and what He's done to us, not confirm who we think He is...Truth would have Him do no less. Therefore His response to even the most well-intentioned imaginations about Him can never be to accept them.....He can't turn the other way or call evil good in the name of loving us, because that wouldn't be love-- to let us live in a lie and call it the Truth. That's what man does, but Righteousness won't let God confirm what isn't True. And though we're often surprised when He reveals that things we thought were true are lies, we wouldn't really want a God who was any other way, would we, because that would mean He was dishonest. And a dishonest God couldn't be trusted.

Now I said all of that so if perchance you happen to feel the Light of God confronting you and searching your heart to expose what's hidden inside, please don't run away or fight Him or try to deny that what He sees is true...Try to simply stand there, naked and open before Him and let Him show you who you are apart from Him...and then turn your heart and agree with His righteous judgment because the moment you do, you'll see that He's made a provision for your flesh in Christ. Unfortunately, we are flesh and we were born with a sin nature-- and the wages of sin is death... but God has made a Way through Jesus so we don't have to LIVE as a slave to sin and death-- unless we want to. Isn't that an amazing thought?

God's answer to the children of Israel's inability to keep the covenant was to set up a place of judgment outside the camp, where flesh could be dealt with and God and man could have a relationship. And that's still His answer for us...

Hebrews 13:12-13 says "Therefore, indeed, in order that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, Jesus suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp bearing His reproach." Outside the camp....That's where we're joined to Him in His death...And joining Him in His death is how we're freed from slavery to death and come to share His life.

Now I'm going to read a portion of Leviticus that struck me in a new way recently...Frankly, not much has EVER struck me from the book of Leviticus before now, so I'm pretty excited about it! :)

The "take off your ornaments" story I read earlier happened before the physical tabernacle had been set up in the midst of Israel...Apparently prior to the building of the tabernacle and instituting of the priesthood, Moses' tent served as a tabernacle of sorts-- a place of judgment and a meeting place with God.

But now we're in Leviticus and there's a literal tabernacle in place...the law has been given and priests are serving in the temple...animals are being sacrificed...And it's through doing those things that Israel maintains their relationship with God. He can now dwell in their midst because He has made full provision for their weakness and inconsistencies through a functioning priesthood. (I feel like we should pause and say YAY! right there!)

You see, He gave them the law- which was basically a written description of Christ- but they couldn't obey the law, could they? So God gave them a priesthood to deal with every transgression that landed them outside of the boundaries the law outlined. God's answer to the sin problem was to give them a priesthood to keep them conformed to the life of Christ described in the Law ...So they walked in covenant with God and lived "In Christ", so to speak, by making sacrifices and offerings, by keeping feasts, etc...

God not only gave the covenant to them, but through the priesthood, He "maintained" the covenant with them from start to finish and all they had to do was do what the Law said. Though God and Man were polar opposites, through the priesthood, they could have a relationship and walk together as one! As long as they kept the commandments and the appropriate sacrifices were offered; as long as they kept the feasts, tithed, etc, then God was free to relate to them in the life of His Son.

Sounds easy, doesn't it??

So what happened when they broke the commandment, as of course they would do because they were flesh? God provided a system of animal sacrifices for them-- the shedding of blood and burning of flesh-- which we know foreshadowed the day when His very own Son would come to earth, die on the Cross and be the Perfect Sacrifice. The one needed to turn the shadow of living as one with God through the Law, into the reality where God and Man were truly joined in one Life.

The Law basically WAS Christ for Old Testament Israel. The Law was the How (the Way) of their relatedness to God; it was the What (the Truth) of their relatedness to God and the Law was the Who (the Life) of their relatedness to God...and this whole wonderful "the Law is Christ" reality was administered to the children of Israel-- it was supplied to them-- through the daily functions and offices of the priests. Of course the children of Israel still stepped outside of the boundaries of the Law-- they couldn't help being flesh-- but what I want you to see is that in the Old Testament, the priesthood was the thing that allowed God and Man to live as one.

You know how God said 'I can't go up in the midst of you because I would consume you.' ? Well eventually He DID dwell in the midst of them, didn't He? It wasn't like He changed His mind....So what did change?? He instituted the priesthood. The tabernacle was set up and a priesthood installed within the camp, so that every single trace of flesh that appeared in the camp could be atoned for and consumed through the constant sacrifices and offerings that were made every moment of every day.

ok -- Leviticus 1:1- 9 "Now the Lord called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When

any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock, of the herd and of the flock.'

'If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.'

'He shall kill the bull before the Lord and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire. Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.' "

And again, this is one of those places where I know there is so much more in it than I'm seeing, but several things stood out to me in this passage...Like where God said 'if anyone wants to bring an offering, he should bring it of his own free will' which reminded me of Exodus 33, where it said how "those who wanted to seek the Lord had to go outside the camp..." Both verses seem to say there's a certain condition of heart necessary for seeking the Lord...a humility...an acknowledging of who we are in the Light of who He is...

Another thing that seemed very real in these verses is the part "Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering and it will be accepted on his behalf, to make atonement for him."

Now I want you to picture yourself in Old Testament Israel...Picture yourself as the man in Lev 1.....I mean, it's easy to read those words and let them remain only words...But imagine how you'd feel when you realized you'd knowingly or unknowingly sinned-- the moment you realized you'd disobeyed God or stepped outside the written law because you were "flesh"...Here God had established this wonderful covenant of blessings for you to enjoy and all you had to do was stay within the boundaries of the law. But now you've gone and done or been something contrary what He outlined! Which means it's either be thrown outside the camp and die there OR bring an animal to the priest and kill it before God. But either way, death is what is waiting.

Being in right relationship to God was hands down the best way to go, so if you were smart, you'd do what the law required and bring the most perfect animal you owned to the door of the tabernacle. And you'd place your hand on its head -- because remember, the animal is supposed to be you- your flesh- your transgression- your sin -- and you'd watch as it was killed. That couldn't have been a pretty sight...I'm sure it was gruesome just like when I saw that camel die on TV...There'd be blood everywhere... it would be dabbed here and there and then poured around the altar...the animal was then skinned, cut up, and its pieces were laid on the wood. Certain parts would be washed, but it all was destined to be burned and the ashes taken outside the camp and scattered until the animal was completely gone...

I mean, sure you watched the animal die and then you got up and walked away, but when God had you lay your hand on the head of that animal, He was trying to have you to see in a heart way that in His eyes, when that animal was put to death, your flesh, your sin was "put to death" too!

God's righteous judgment fell, blood was shed, and sin was condemned so a right relationship with God could be restored. According to God, the "flesh life" your transgression originated out from didn't really walk away or *escape* anything.

But no matter how many times the children of Israel went through that whole thing-- no matter how many animals died-- their whole lives were spent always needing one more animal because in some way, shape, or form, they'd always be "flesh in the camp" again...

Hebrews 10:1 says the Law was a shadow of the good things to come but it could never clean the conscience or make perfect the ones who brought the sacrifices...The Law was good in every way, but it was also a constant reminder of all the ways the people broke God's commandments...which is why they needed to bring sacrifices over and over and over again...Hebrews 10:4 says "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin..."

But what it was impossible for the Law to do, God did in sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that we may become the righteousness of God in Him....

I hope you can see where I'm heading...I painted that bleak picture for you so you can identify with their "here we go again" flesh experience, and because I want you see the greatness of what God accomplished for us when Jesus died on the cross and put an end to that whole way of relating to God. Christ's death was the One-Time Sacrifice God required to put away all flesh, for all time...A Sacrifice that would never lose its power or need to be done over again.

I think that's the longing God hoped Israel's heart would be filled with when the actual Person of the covenant-- Jesus Christ-- came into their midst 2000 years ago...

You know how in the book of John it says John the Baptist saw Jesus and said "Behold! The Lamb of God, the one taking away the sin of the world!" Well after reading the first few chapters of Leviticus that day, suddenly the whole book of John looked like God's attempt to reveal Jesus as the Lamb of God to anyone who was humble enough to recognize their sinful condition before a righteous God and start looking around for the perfect Lamb to offer. When God sent His Son, He wasn't offering Israel yet another animal, but the perfect one-time, deal-with-the-weakness -of-flesh-forever Sacrifice He knew the flesh problem really needed. And that's still how God is presenting Christ to hearts today.

You know, we might not have known exactly what was happening the moment we gave our hearts to the Lord and entered into a relationship with God in Christ, but now I see being born again as us taking God up on His grand one-time, end-all offer of Jesus as our spotless Lamb...But here's the difference:

In the Levitical priesthood, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrificed animal and pour and sprinkle and dab it in various places in the tabernacle, but he always stopped just outside of the veil and sprinkled the blood in front of it...Do you see how that speaks of the "limit" of what an animal sacrifice could do? It could only temporarily "purify flesh" because it really wasn't the kind of sacrifice needed to remove flesh forever.

And the Old Testament high priest was forbidden to enter into the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt, except on the Day of Atonement when he would carry the blood of the

sacrifice beyond the veil and into the presence of the God. On that one day he'd sprinkle it on the mercy seat and God would see it and the sin of the people would be atoned for and Israel would be ok for another year. Hebrews 9:8 says that whole process had to be enacted out year after year because the permanent way into the Holy of Holies hadn't been manifested yet. Doing it year after year served to point to the time when Christ, our Great High Priest would carry His own blood-- the blood of the Perfect Sacrifice-- behind the veil, into the presence of God....

Hebrews 9:11-14 says "Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation." "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh," "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

When we "got saved" we took Christ as our Lamb but remember, those animals didn't die INSTEAD of the person who'd sinned...they died AS the person who'd sinned...God saw SIN being dealt with and destroyed...So when Christ died, He didn't die instead of us...He died for us, AS US....AS the man of sin who couldn't help who he was because he was born with an adamic sin nature...On the Cross, the whole sin nature problem was gathered into the body of Christ and put to death. And when He died, sin's hold over man died too.

And then it says that through the eternal Spirit, as High Priest, Christ carried His own blood throughout the tabernacle and the behind the veil and Hebrews 9:24 says "He entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...And remember, we were joined to Him in death. We are In Christ....And where Christ is, we are too....

There is such a beautiful, final-but-ongoing reality in what Christ accomplished! What Christ did, He only needed to do one time, yet it's forever active in us and for us. Hebrews 10:14 "For by one offering He has perfected forever those *who are being* sanctified." The revealing of what He did is ongoing in us. We may have a sin consciousness that works in us and creates a feeling of separation-- a veil-- between God and man, and with one another, but that isn't what is true for those who are in Christ. We don't have to live with a veil of flesh separating us, if we let God show us that Christ removed it.

It's true, animal blood could only purify flesh, but the blood of Christ offered one time to God was powerful enough to PUT AWAY FLESH FOREVER and cleanse our conscience and bring us behind the veil in Christ! And seeing that changes everything! And now we *live in Christ*, who is always appearing in the presence of God....And every time He appears, that's what we'll see-- because it's true.

And it is with that view established in our hearts that Hebrews 10:19- 25 continues on to say "Therefore brethren, having boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God," "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean and our bodies washed with pure water." "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works," "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching."

I'm sorry this is so long, but I feel like this reality is so huge and crucial, but it's also impossible to describe it in 45 minutes!

To end, remember how I wanted God to either fix the negative changes I felt were happening or at least fix me so I didn't notice them anymore?? Well now I think that what God REALLY wants to do isn't necessarily fix situations we find frustrating...I think that whether we've come to know it or not, He's already fixed everything for us in Christ and now He's always trying to show us what He HAS DONE, so we can live in the good of it and experience it with one another. I'll say it again, His answer to our problems will ALWAYS be to reveal Christ in us because when Christ appears, He will appear apart from sin, just like the high priest did on the Day of Atonement...And sin is always the problem...We are always the problem.

Hebrews 10:24 says "Consider one another..." but I've been realizing it's very dangerous to do that if we have a foundational misunderstanding of ourselves and one another. If we consider one another BEFORE we've seen that we've been cleansed and covered and alive in Christ...I know I need to see with those eyes or eventually, I'll get discouraged either because of who I am or because of who you are...and that I'll stop short or give up and drift away...

But if we "take off our ornaments" and humble our hearts and let God show us what Christ our High Priest has done for us, more and more we will be able to truly function as the kingdom of priests God says we are...and we'll be priests that serve God and one another in truth, because the Life of Christ will be ruling in all of us....And that's when things get really good!