

## 467 “full, perfect and sufficient”

In last week's Reflection we focussed on the meticulous instructions given by the Lord God to Moses concerning the tabernacle, its equipment and its activities (Exodus Chapters 24 – 31). All these were to cope with the old Adam-caused problem of Genesis Chapter 3: the gulf that now exists between our holy Creator on the one side, and us, His un-holy, sinful people on the other. God's holiness, if left to itself, simply destroys anything it encounters that is not holy (Exodus 28.33-35). What is more, to satisfy God's holiness and righteousness, the blood of the guilty sinner must be shed, hence truly “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6.23a / and, eg., Genesis 2.17).

We note in passing that “death” does NOT mean extinction, for anyone, but is rather a conscious, visible, eternal separation from the Lord God Almighty our Creator; the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 16.19-31 for instance make this all too clear. This state of separation in eternity, after physical death, is in fact only a continuation of the sinner's state of separation before physical death, but has now become much more visible to the lost sinner, and much more hopeless (eg., Revelation 20.11-15).

So – there is the Bad News, and it is only when people understand this Bad News, and their own place within it unless they do something about it, that the Good News of the Gospel suddenly begins to make such wondrous sense. For, praise God, in His mercy He mingles His utter holiness with His forbearance and love (eg., Romans 3.24-25; 5.8-11).

Hence, first, and solely on the basis of the promised “Seed of the woman” (Genesis 3.15), the Lord God gave to Adam and Eve “coats of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3.21): our first parents were now clothed - covered - because the blood of innocent animals had been shed by the Lord's own hands on the sinners' behalf. Those little coats were just a tiny token, yet they expressed the great central principle at the heart of God's Word and of God's dealings with His fallen creation: that sin leads to death - the conscious, eternal separation of the sinner from Almighty God. This sin is dealt with EITHER by the shedding of the sinner's own blood, if unforgiven – the consequence being death; OR by the shedding of an innocent, NON-sinner's blood being shed on the sinner's behalf – the consequences being pardon, forgiveness, escape, life, and eternal fellowship with Almighty God our Creator. Put like that, the best way forward for the sinner is rather obvious!

Second, the Lord God formed His chosen covenant people through Abram and Sarai, to be a “visual aid” for the rest of us (eg., Genesis 12.1-3; 13.14-17), with “the law” and animal sacrifice placed at the heart of this covenant, notably at the annual Passover. The daily life of the tabernacle, and of the temple later on, was a very bloody business, with the slaughtering of perfect animals and the shedding of their blood as tokens – only tokens, that is all they were and were able to be – of God’s forgiveness of His people’s sins by this continuous shedding of innocent animal blood.

All this animal sacrificing in reality achieved nothing at all in the way of God’s forgiveness! It consisted only of a vivid, gracious holding operation until the ultimate sin-free Man laid aside His heavenly glory and came down to be one of us, and One among us – not quite the same thing (egs., Isaiah 9.6-7 / Luke 1.30-33 / John 1.29-34 / II Corinthians 5.14-21 / Philippians 2. 5-8 / Hebrews 1.1-4 / ...). As the Prayer of Consecration in the Prayer Book puts it so well – on the cross Jesus “made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full perfect and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world”.

Hallelujah! On that awful cross God’s holiness has been fully satisfied by the death of Jesus Christ, God’s only-begotten Son. Now, any sinners can claim the Father’s forgiveness of their sins by acknowledging before Him that Jesus’ innocent blood was shed on their own behalf. Then the blessings flow in abundance! – (as we mentioned last week for instance in Hebrews 10.19-24 / also eg., Romans 4.7-8 (Psalm 32.1-2)). But, just as true and just as vital as ever, until then, until that claiming of forgiveness from the Father by the blood of Christ, those blessings remain unreleased and ungranted - and those sinners’ sins remain unforgiven.

As we now mark, as the Prayer Book compilers put it, “The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birth-Day of Christ, commonly called Christmas Day”, we see the birth of that little Baby in its broad scriptural context – as God’s long-promised entry into His sinful creation in His Son, to make possible His genuine forgiveness, to be granted to repentant sinners by the shedding of the sinless blood of His own Son.

We now join with our fellow Christians around the world in giving thanks afresh for the simple, enormous truth, that now, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5.1).

May we all therefore have a very blessed “Nativity of our Lord”!

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