

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CURTAINS OF GOATS' HAIR AND FINE TWINED LINEN

“And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair to be a covering upon the tabernacle. And thou shalt couple five curtains by themselves, and shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle” (Exodus 26:7,9).

THE curtain of goats' hair was near the covering of rams' skins.

From the outside it was the third covering; counting from the inside, it was the second covering, the embroidered curtain of fine twined linen. The Holy Spirit draws our special attention to it, giving a detailed description of it. It was different from the other coverings in that there were eleven curtains instead of ten, and that it was one yard longer than the curtains of linen.

The goats we saw in Palestine were small and mostly black. There are, however, some species having fine, white, silky hair, like that of the Angora goat, and I like to think with many commentators that these were chosen for the tabernacle. Nothing can be good enough for the house of God. The eleventh curtain was doubled up in the forefront of the tabernacle; the other curtains could be so arranged that they spanned the roof and hung down and covered the south and north walls as well as the back wall, so that the tabernacle was entirely covered by the goats' hair skins. It would be possible so to arrange this curtain that a border could be seen at the foot of the cherubim curtains; and if we are right in the assumption that white goats were chosen, their white, silky hair would furnish a beautiful white border.

At every one of the great Jewish feasts, the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of the first fruits, the feast of Ingathering at Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement, the goat had to be the sin-offering. It seems to me, therefore, that the coverings of goats' hair teach us two most important facts of our Christian life.

Substitution and Forgiveness:

God instituted the Feast of Passover to be kept on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib. He said: **“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you”** (Exodus 12:2).

It shows the importance God attached to the deliverance of His people out of the bondage of Egypt, and He wished His people to consider it in the same light. An old officer met my colleague and told him it was his birthday. My friend asked him how old he was and the answer was, “Seven years today.” It was seven years ago that he had given his heart to the Saviour, that he was born again. The old major had two birthdays and considered that the latter was the time he really began to live. Reader, have you also two birthdays?

The feast of unleavened bread (Deuteronomy 16:3) was closely connected with the Passover. It began on the day after the Passover. No leaven was to be found in their houses and during those seven days, only unleavened bread was eaten — a custom still kept up by the Jews till this day. Leaven in the Old Testament is always mentioned in an evil sense. It is a symbol of sin and corruption. On every day of this week a goat was offered for a sin-offering.

The feast of the firstfruits (Exodus 23:19) was celebrated in spring. Young and old were longing to see the first green sprouting out of the earth. It was also connected with the Passover. It is clear that they could only celebrate it after they had left the wilderness behind them, crossed the Jordan, and settled in the land. The firstfruit belonged to the Lord. This was only right. I do not think I ever ate the first strawberries in our garden or the first peach. I kept them for somebody I liked better than myself. It was waved before the Lord for His acceptance. It was followed by the different sacrifices, the sin-offering being a goat.

The Holy Spirit teaches us the meaning of the feast of the firstfruits. It foreshadowed Christ risen from the dead. **“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming”** (I Corinthians 15:23). This is comfort when we stand at an open grave: **“I live, ye shall live also”** (John 14:19).

Seven weeks later on the feast of Pentecost with grateful hearts, the children of Israel brought the Lord a tribute of the first sheaves of corn in joyful expectation of the harvest which was to follow. How the Master's heart rejoices when day by day souls are brought into the fold, both Jews and Gentiles, bringing the day of His coming nearer. Then the great harvest festival will take place when He comes in the clouds for His own.

Those sheaves of corn make our hearts rejoice. They speak of new life, resurrection life. That does not mean, however, that the old nature has been eradicated. Even to the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23) the Lord says: **“Take ye a kid of the goats for a sin-offering.”** **“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”** — the curtains of goats' hair (II Corinthians 9:15).

The day of Atonement (described in Leviticus 16 and 23). Christ our high priest; Christ the sacrifice. How the people looked forward to that day! It was on the tenth day of the seventh month that the high priest offered sacrifices for himself and the people. It was on that day and on that day only that the high priest entered the Holy of holies.

May I ask you to read carefully Leviticus 16 and the explanation the Holy Spirit gives us in Hebrews 9.

He tells us how the Holiest of holies is the embodiment of the Holiness of God. He tells us how Christ made a new and living way through the veil that is His flesh; and that now the way into the holiest is open for each child of God; and that not only once a year, but that at any time we may come in full assurance to the throne of grace; that it is even possible always to be in the conscious presence of the most High.

How sad it is that so many believers remain in the outer court and so miss the joy of the Holy Ghost, for “**in His presence is fullness of joy, at his right hand pleasures for evermore**” (Psalm. 16:11).

The high priest in Israel was a sinner as the people. He, therefore, had to sacrifice first a bullock as a sin-offering for himself. Our high priest need not do this. God has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin.

The curtains of goats' hair speak to us of Substitution and Forgiveness.

Two goats were presented to the Lord at the door of the tabernacle on the day of atonement. The sacrifice Christ made for us on Golgotha is so many-sided that one symbol would not be sufficient. Lots were cast upon the two goats. The one upon whom the Lord's lot fell was slain as a sin-offering for the people, and the high priest brought its blood within the veil and sprinkled it on the mercy-seat to make an atonement for the uncleanness of the children of Israel because of their transgressions in all their sins.

In Christ we have our place in the Holiest. Christ tasted death in all its bitterness for us. The curtains of goats' hair speak of substitution. He entered the holiest through the veil with His own blood. His glorious resurrection was the pledge that God had accepted the sacrifice and now there is no longer a veil between our heavenly Father and His children.

The Lord's goat had been offered as a sin-offering, the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat. God had taken away everything which could hinder the people from approaching Him. Sin had fixed a great gulf between the Holy God and sinful man; no man was able to span that chasm. Jesus Christ is the bridge between us and God. Jacob in his dream saw the ladder which was not only in his father's tent, but also with the exile from his father's home in the lonely desert. That ladder reached to heaven (Genesis 28:12). Need we wonder that he called the name of that place Bethel, *the house of God*? Jesus Christ is the ladder between God and us. That ladder is not too short, nothing need be added to it. It reaches Father's heart in heaven. “**There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**” (I Timothy 2:5). The curtains of goats' hair.

Divine Forgiveness, the curtains of goats' hair also speak to us.

The goat which the Lord had destined to be the scapegoat was brought to the altar. The high priest laid both his hands upon its head, all the sins of his people which had been atoned by the blood. We can imagine the solemn hush as the people listened to this awful recital.

A man is waiting to lead it into the desert. The crowd gives way to him; it opens its rows and gives him a broad passage. Their hearts beat more freely. That goat will never come back. All the sins of God's children are cast into the depths of the sea (Micah.7:19).

The sea will give up the dead which are in it, but never the sins of God's children covered by the blood of the lamb.

“Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isaiah 38:17).

God always goes forward in His course; He never goes back.

We do not wonder now that the curtain had an extra length and that the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle had to be doubled. Everyone could see that Israel had received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins, if she would only accept it.

If in the East, a reckoning was paid, it was folded double and a nail fastened through it as a sign that it had been paid. Curtains of goats' hair, you bring us good news. You speak to us of our heavenly Father.

“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm. 103:12).

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1, 2).

Scapegoat, as we follow thee in our thoughts in the desert, we shall never forget that Christ was made sin for us. As the high priest transferred the transgressions of the people to thy head and thou didst become so identified with them that thou didst become unclean, and the man who led thee away in the desert had to be cleansed; so our sins met in Christ. He took them upon Himself; He stood before God as though in some mysterious way they had become His own, and God who justifieth, who declares us just, the ungodly (Romans 4:5), has accepted us in His beloved Son. Our God will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

But God is not only merciful and of great goodness, but He is also just. He loves the sinner, but cannot leave sin unpunished. In olden times a king had published a severe edict against adultery. Anyone found guilty should have both his eyes stuck out. The first culprit was his own son.

What will the old king do? If he were to spare his own son, the feeling of justice amongst his people would have been wounded for many ages. The father was the judge, but the judge was the father.

“However it may hurt me,” he said, “I dare not act against the law of the kingdom. The punishment is the loss of both eyes. Stick out one of my eyes and one of my son's.”

The father was just, but he was also merciful. Our Saviour has done far more. He did not say, "I will bear half the punishment, and the sinner the other half." No, He took the whole burden of our sins upon Himself. Curtains of goats' hair, you speak to us of the love, the everlasting love, of our heavenly Father and of the substitutionary suffering of our Redeemer.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:19, 20).

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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