Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The Chernobyl Nuclear explosion happened in 1986, so 34 years ago. And those ordered in to try and clean up after the explosion were exposed to radiation levels of up to 16,000 Millisieverts or MsVs for short. And to give you some idea of how much radiation that is, I am sure you have all had an X-ray at the dentist. And you will have noticed that the dentist and the assistant leave the room for the moment when the X-ray is taken. Yes? And that is because each X-ray releases a small amount of radiation, which is safe enough for you but if the dentist and technician stayed in the room for every X-ray, the amounts would build up over time and be unsafe for them. Well, a dental X-ray releases 0.01 MsVs, and the Chernobyl cleaners were exposed to a16,000 MsVs! or the equivalent of 1,600,000 dental X-rays as soon as they arrived on site! It’s no wonder that they died just weeks later.

And here are more Chernobyl facts:

* The nuclear reactor core melted down into a blob of metal that is called the ‘elephant’s foot,’ because of its shape. It has been entombed in a massive concrete bunker, but it will be radioactive for 20,000 years!
* The exclusion zone around Chernobyl, which is contaminated by radiation fallout, is roughly equivalent to all the land from Auckland down to Hamilton and everything across. And depending on where you are in the exclusion zone, the land will be radioactive for up to 400 years!

So I want you to imagine that you are kidnapped and blindfolded, and that after a long journey the blindfold is removed, and once you adjust your eyes to the light you see a sign that says ‘Welcome to Chernobyl.’ And when you turn around you are right next to the concrete bunker that is the old Chernobyl reactor. So, knowing what I have just told you, how would you feel? Contaminated! Poisoned! Dirty! Toxic! You would not want to breathe or touch anything. You would scream to the person who brought you there, begging them to take you away from this radioactive place. Yes? And what would it take for you to feel comfortable about being in Chernobyl? Knowing that it was free of radiation.

Well, I have asked you to imagine this to give you some idea of what this next sacrifice in Leviticus, the one our Bibles call the sin offering, was all about. You will remember that there was a time in the Garden of Eden when the Lord would come down and walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. But the moment that Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, it was **the spiritual equivalent of a nuclear explosion**. Who they were, what they did, and every molecule and fibre of the whole of creation was infected and poisonous and contaminated and toxic and filthy with sin. And this meant that it was no longer possible for God, who is perfectly holy, to walk on sin-contaminated soil and to breathe sin-contaminated air, and to be near disobedient and unclean people.

And that is why the situation here in Leviticus was extraordinary and incredible; God had returned to live on earth, within the Tabernacle, among His people. And if the idea of finding yourself in Chernobyl seems awful to you, I hope it gives you some idea of what it would have been like for this holy God to come down to live in a tabernacle and among a people where every molecule and fibre and act is contaminated with sin and uncleanness. And that’s what this offering was about – removing the contamination of sin and all its consequences, so that God could live among His people.

And congregation, this is why many commentators prefer to call this offering the **purification** offering rather than the sin offering.

* We have already seen that sin was in view with the burnt offering and the peace offering. With those offerings too, the worshiper had to lay his hand on the head of the animal, which symbolized the transfer of sin and guilt, and recognize that although he deserved to die for his sins, this animal would die in his place. So sin was in view with the other offerings also.
* In addition, we read here that blood had to be sprinkled **in the tabernacle** and later in Leviticus we will read that had to be sprinkled i**n the house of a person who had leprosy**. But tents and houses do not sin, right? And it is not even sinful to catch leprosy. But because leprosy was so contagious, it was a symbol of the uncleanness that sin had brought into all of creation. So for God’s OT people, the tabernacle itself and the house of lepers had to be purified.
* And another reason for this offering was **childbirth**. And I am pretty sure that all of you who have visited Ali and Susan in recent days have done so to congratulate them; not to point out their sin. Right? Giving birth is not some moral failure. In fact, the Lord commands us to be fruitful and multiply. But you will remember that after the Fall, God said to Eve, in pain you shall give birth. So childbirth and all of its pain and blood is a reminder of the Fall. And that is why childbirth was an unclean process for God’s Old Testament people. And this offering ‘removed the ritual uncleanness’ from the mother.

So all of this is why it is better to view this offering as the purification offering rather than the sin offering.

And we have taken a good chunk of time to lay all this out because as sinners, we get very used to sin, don’t we. In many ways, we view it as a normal part of life; something we cannot avoid. But we have to understand that sin is spiritual radiation – it contaminates everything. And if you haven’t got the picture yet, in **Isaiah 64:6**, the prophet says that even our good works are “*like filthy rags*” in God’s eyes. And filthy rags literally means used sanitary pads covered in period blood. So even our best works are so contaminated by sin that they are as used sanitary pads in God’s eyes. Now, I hasten to add, as we saw this morning, that God truly delights in our worship and obedience. He is pleased by our good works. But we have to understand that sin clings to every aspect of who we are and what we do and even the fabric of creation. For it is only when we understand how disgusting sin is in God’s eyes that sin will disgust us and this offering will make sense. But even more importantly than understanding this offering, thinking about sin opens our eyes to what Jesus did for us:

* He left heaven to live on this sin-contaminated earth. (I remember visiting a chicken farm once and being shown one of the sheds that was full of chickens. Well, when the door was opened, the smell of the chickens was overpowering. You couldn’t escape it and it was disgusting. And for the Lord Jesus, every breath of earth’s air would have reeked of sin.)
* He added a human nature to His divine nature.
* He was born. He had to go through this process, which we have seen, was ritually unclean in God’s eyes.
* And He came into contact with and touched lepers and dead bodies and all types of human uncleanness.
* And every day He lived in close contact with sinners like you and me.
* And He died and was buried in a tomb!
* And at the cross, as **2 Corinthians 5:21** explains, God made “*Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.” All of our spiritual radiation was put on His shoulders so that we could receive His spotless, perfect, obedient, cleanness. This is your Saviour! This is what Jesus endured for you!

And now that we are half way into the sermon, we will use the rest of our time to briefly explore some of the details of the purification offering to see even more of the glory and grace of Jesus Christ, against the backdrop of sin and uncleanness.

1. So we will begin with a few words about **the sin and uncleanness** that made this offering necessary.
   1. 4:1-2 explain that this offering was to be presented when the worshiper had sinned “**unintentionally**.”
      1. And unintentionally means ‘not on purpose.’ Later in **Numbers 15** the Lord contrasts unintentional sins with He calls ‘high hand sins,’ meaning wilful, deliberate, on purpose commandment breaking. There was no offering for sinning in that way; whoever committed sin on purpose was to be cut off from among the people. And later in that chapter, there is an example of this when a person who gathered sticks for a fire on the Sabbath Day, despite knowing that this was forbidden, was stoned to death. That’s how seriously God views sin. Deliberate sin was punished with excommunication/execution, and unintentional sin required this offering for there to be forgiveness.
      2. So what sorts of sins are in view here? Well, because of the details of the many rituals and festivals and regulations in the law, it was possible to violate the law without knowing it. And this could be done accidently or when you knew what you were doing but you did not realize that it was wrong. So things like tithing, or coming into contact with unclean persons or things, or ceremonial or festival duties were areas of life where it was possible to sin unintentionally. 5:1-6 give some examples of things that someone might have done, knowing what he or she was doing, but not knowing that they were breaking the law or making themselves unclean.
      3. **Modern examples of unintentional sins** would be disobeying road rules, without meaning to, or entering the wrong gender toilet, by mistake, or not paying a tax that you should have paid because you did not realize that you had to pay it, or forgetting to pay a bill or a fine or a tax bill by the due date. So you never intended to do wrong but you did wrong. And if you tried to use ignorance as your defense, you will know that ignorance of the law is no excuse and you must pay the fine!
      4. Andthe main point here in Leviticus is that even unintentional or ignorant sin was still sin that offended the Lord.
   2. Other reasons for this offering, as we have noted, were childbirth, recovering from leprosy or some similar skin disease, or coming into contact with a dead body. And in addition, any bodily discharge, the dedication of a priest, because he was a sinful human being, when a Nazarite completed a vow, as well as prescribed religious festivals, were other occasions when this offering was to be presented. And the Lord was so concerned about the holiness of His people that He allowed **poor** people to bring two birds and the **poorest of the poor** to bring a handful of flour.
   3. What God wanted all His people to understand **the sinfulness of sin**; how it infects and contaminates everything. So as you can imagine, the purification offering was a very common offering.
      1. And as we have seen and will see, Jesus took all our sin and uncleanness on Himself. As the **hymn-writer** put it: My sin, oh the bliss, of this glorious thought; my sin, not in part, but the whole; is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, it is well with my soul! Hallelujah! What a Saviour!
      2. But knowing this, as we do, should make us even more troubled by our sins than God’s OT people were.
      3. In **Matthew 12:36**, Jesus said, “*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak*.” Just think about that list in regards to yourself for a moment. Every word that you have not carefully thought about to see that it was good and wholesome and would build others up will need to be accounted for.
      4. **Hebrews 4:12-13** says, “*For the word of God is living and active … discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must* *give account*.” Every thought and intention of your heart will need to be accounted for. Imagine all of your thoughts being projected on to some heavenly screen for everyone to see, but more importantly, for God to see. This should horrify us and lead us to ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify even our thoughts!
      5. Now, as we have seen and as we shall see, all our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus. Hallelujah! But we should still **hate sin**; we should be disgusted by our sin. And we should be continually confessing our sins and being particular about our sins, so that our love for Christ and our thankfulness for His sacrifice grows!
2. But let’s also make a few observations about **the different people** who had to present the purification offering.
   1. And as ch’s 4-5 unfold we are basically presented with a list that begins with the most serious consequences of sin and goes down to the least serious consequences of sin. Let me explain:
      1. Verses 3-12 describe the offering for “***the anointed priest***.” And while this could mean all priests, the only other reference to the anointed priest that we find in the Bible, which is in ch. 6, suggests that the person in view here is the High Priest. And pretty much every commentator agrees with this. And as the religious leader of the Lord’s people, his sins had the biggest consequences, because he was supposed to set the right example and if he became unclean that affected his ability to minister on behalf of the people.
      2. Verses 13-21 describe the offering for the “***whole congregation of Israel***.” And this probably means the rulers of the people, who represented the people. Earlier in their history, God commanded Moses to appoint 70 men as Judges to rule the people with him. And they became the government if you like. Later on in the Bible we learn that they were called the Sanhedrin – literally, ‘those who sat together to rule.’ And in v15, we see that the elders of the congregation laid their hands on the head of the sacrificial animal. So one step lower than the sins of the High Priest, the sin and uncleanness of the government also had consequences for all of the people.
      3. And verses 22-26 take us down to the next level of seriousness, which is the sin of **one leader**, and then vv27-34 describe the lowest level of sin, which is the sin of a common person.
   2. Now, this **list is in no way intended to lessen the seriousness of sin**. Have you ever been part of a discussion about whether some sins are more serious than others. Yes? Well, sin is sin – it is all offensive to the Lord. And just one sin, any sin, makes a person worthy of death and hell. But what this list reveals is that when those in high office commit the same sins that a common person commits, the **consequences** of their sin are more public and far-reaching. Think of ministers and politicians who have been discovered in sin. It is always big news and devastating for many people, and it usually means that the individual will lose his position.
      1. This is why the Spirit of the Lord says, in **James 3:1**, “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness*.” If you put your hand up to serve in office, then you must accept the scrutiny and responsibility that goes with it.
      2. And this is why itis so important that you pray for myself andthe other elders and the deacons, and all the office-bearers in Christ’s church. None of us are out of sin’s reach and the devil knows the damage that the sin of an officer can cause. So just as you pray that the Lord would not lead *you* into temptation, so you should pray this for your office-bearers.
3. Well, that brings us, lastly, to **the method** of the purification offering.
   1. And we begin with what was done with **the blood**.
      1. And in connection with the seriousness of the consequences of the sin for different persons or groups that wee just looked at:
         1. Verses 5-7 explain that with the sin of the high priest, he would take some of the blood of the bull into the tabernacle and dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times in front of the veil that lead into the most Holy Place of the tabernacle. And then he had to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of incense inside the tabernacle. The rest of the blood was then taken outside and poured at the base of the altar of burnt offering.
         2. And the same blood ‘routine’ was expected in connection with the sin of the whole congregation.
         3. But when it was one leader, there was no requirement for blood to be sprinkled inside the tabernacle; it was just put on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and the rest was poured out at the base of the altar.
         4. And it was the same for the sin of a common person.
      2. Now, start adding up all of this blood in your mind. Can you imagine how much blood flowed, every day, all day, at the Tabernacle, and later at the Temple? According to Google, your average bull – around 40 litres of blood (20 coke bottles full!); your average sheep or goat – around 16 litres of blood. And in In 1 Kings 8 we read about the dedication of the temple built by King Solomon. 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed! That is rivers of blood!
      3. So the ground at the base of the altar would have been drenched with blood. And later on, when the temple was built out of stone, it had a massive drainage system underneath that allowed the blood to drain out of the city of Jerusalem and into the Brook Kidron.
      4. This is one reason why the Lord required the burning of incense all day long – blood and butchering animals is an incredibly stinky business!
      5. But all these sin offerings were not enough, by themselves, to make the tabernacle and the people clean. When we get to Leviticus 16, we will read about the annual Day of Atonement. On that day, it was as though despite all of the daily blood sprinklings, still the tabernacle and the people were too contaminated for God to remain among them. And so the High Priest had to kill a bull for himself and the priests, and bring its blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle it on the cover of the Ark of the covenant and seven times in front of it, and then he had to go back out and kill a goat for the people and go back into the Most Holy Place and do the same with its blood. And then he would go out and put some of the blood of the bull and the goat and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and then sprinkle it seven times on the altar. And in this way the tabernacle and the priests and the people were thoroughly decontaminated, once a year, every year, so that the Lord could remain among them.
      6. Do you know what book of the NT is often called the Bible’s very own commentary on the Leviticus? Hebrews. And do you know what Hebrews says about all of this blood? **Hebrews 10:4**: “*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*.” What?! So whether it was the annual bull a family, or the twice daily bull offered by the priests, or the annual bull and goat offered on the Day of Atonement, or the 22,000 bulls and 120,000 goats offered by King Solomon, none of them actually accomplished the forgiveness of sins; none of them made worshippers clean; none of them made it possible for a person to enter into the presence of God.
      7. And make no mistake, as **Hebrews 9:22** spells out, “w*ithout the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*” So why was all of this blood shed? How are sins actually forgiven? How are we cleansed and made able to enter into God’s presence? Well, listen to **Ephesians 1:7**: “*In [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins*.” **Revelation 7:14** describes believers as those washed by the blood of THE LAMB [Jesus]. **Hebrews 10:19** says, “*We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus*.”
         1. Have you ever seen a person who has been where hazardous materials are being decontaminated? They are hosed down and scrubbed. Well, the message of the gospel is that we are contaminated with sin. And the only thing that can decontaminate us is the blood of Jesus. And there is no blood bath or high pressure blood hose; you just have to recognize that you are contaminated – admit your sin and be eager not to sin – and believe that Jesus shed His blood on the cross so that your sins would be forgiven. Do that and in God’s eyes you become clean. And that does not mean you will become instantly sinless. Sin is something that will cling to you until you are with Jesus. And that is something that the next offering, the guilt offering is about. But in terms of your salvation standing; in terms of whether God sees you as righteous or wicked, because of the blood of Jesus, you are righteous/spotless/clean.
   2. Well, I want us to finish with one last detail from the method of this offering to reinforce what we have just said about salvation this point. Do you remember what happened to the carcass of the animal with the burnt offering? It was all burnt on the altar as a food offering to the Lord. And do your remember what happened to the carcass of the peace offering? Some of it was burnt on the altar as a food offering, but the rest was enjoyed as a feast by the worshiper and his family. But with the purification offering, after the fat and the kidneys and the liver of the sin offering were burnt on the altar, the rest of the carcass was **taken outside the camp and burnt on the ash heap**. And because sin offerings were offered all day, every day, the ash heap was always burning; it never went out. So can you guess what this symbolizes? Over here you have God living in fellowship with His purified people, and far away, outside the camp, is a place where the symbol of sin and impurity and defilement is always burning. It is a picture of heaven and hell, isn’t it.
      1. And this is not me trying to be invent a symbolism that doesn’t really exist. Listen to Hebrews 13:11-12, “*For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own* *blood*.”
      2. You will remember that Jesus was taken outside Jerusalem to be crucified at Golgotha. And then, on the cross, during the three hours of darkness, He became forsaken of God. So He endured the agonies of hell so that you would not have to.
      3. Sin is so disgusting and defiling and contaminating that we all deserve to spend eternity in the fires of hell. But eternal life in heaven is what God promises to all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel of the purification offering. Amen.