Leviticus 1

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Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Well, as you're being seated this morning, let's be honest with one another. How many of you, after listening to the Word of God be read this morning, are ready to acknowledge that there is little, if any, love lost between the readers of the Bible today and the book of Leviticus?

I don't know if you've ever heard a series on Leviticus. I've never preached one. So I'm in the same boat you're in. We're here together. This portion of the Pentateuch is more often skipped over than studied.
It's where Bible reading plans go to die. It's more often put away than preached. And for good reasons, at least we tell ourselves so.
After all, was not this book of the law replaced by God's love? Is not the intended audience of Leviticus so far removed from us, foreign even in circumstance or situation to us?
And for those of you who are already following Jesus, when you hear it, are not its requirements already rendered obsolete? Therefore, we don't treat Israel's ancient cultic practices as anything other than arcane.
[1:26] We don't approach God like this anymore. This book is impenetrable. This book is obscure. Thanks be to God, we say, as we hear it read.

However, does not Leviticus stand in the central spot of the five books of the law? And should not that matter to us?
Or are only our self-selected parts of Israel's experiences meant to be taken as examples for us?
And though our circumstances differ, isn't Leviticus concerned with how those who have already been made right with God learn how to continually go on with God?
Was Israel, who'd been redeemed by the Passover blood, to have no interest at all in what it would take to restore their relationship with God after falling?
[2:29] Of what it would take to renew their relationship with God on the backside of rebellion or succumbing to a religious ritual? The answers to these questions are likewise yes.

Yes, yes to them all. And so, perhaps, for a few months at the start of this year, you'll join me in an exercise like we have never done before.
I invite you, Christ Church Chicago, to welcome in the new year with me with the recovery of Leviticus. To my way of thinking, this book couldn't come at a better time.
Having just finished Christmas, which is what? A celebration of God come down to us. We look to Leviticus to see what it is God expects to be going back up to him.
We're ready to explore together in ancient text, but not without application or action. Perhaps you're not yet convinced. Perhaps you say, well, I made it to the first one, but I don't plan on coming back.
[3:36] Well, let me just say two brief words about how this book might help us, how this book might provide hope to us.

Even before we get into the chapter that's been read for us. I've already mentioned that Leviticus is placed at the very heart of what's called the Pentateuch. If you don't know what that is, it's simply the first five books of the Bible.
They're also called the books of the law. They're all attributed to Moses. Leviticus sits in the middle. But we might be helped by thinking about the placement of Leviticus.
There's more than being in the middle. This book stands in between. It stands in between two of the most significant events in Israel's history.
That of Moses setting up the tabernacle with which the book before, that is, Exodus just finished. And the people setting out from the mountain, all the books that will immediately follow.
[4:42] These two places, this book sits between the setting up and the setting out. And we know that because Exodus 40, chapter 2, indicates that the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the

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first month of the second year.

And the book following Leviticus in the early chapters will state that they set out on the 12th day of the second month of the second year. So, you're in a book that's been given to God's people that bridges roughly the one month period that separates their setting up something for God.
And their setting out with God. Leviticus takes Israel from listening to God at the mountain to hearing his voice along the way.
It takes them from the Exodus in all of its fullness to what it's going to mean to have ongoing access. It takes them from redemption to restoration and renewal.
This book takes you then from the older Passover blood which saved them to a sacrificial blood that will keep them.
[6:00] By design then, the very placement of this book is to teach God's people what it's going to take to experience his presence day by day.

If you're a Christian already, what I'm just trying to say is this book might help you. You might not only need his saving power, you need him every hour.
Not just the hour I first believed. But there's another reason that we might want to look at Leviticus. Not only that it will be of some help to us who have come to the Lord as his people and need to walk with his people until we enter into his presence.
It can provide hope for all of us. The persistence of God's love toward us is seen in Leviticus. Not just the placement of Leviticus in the law, but the persistence of his love for us.
The book wastes no time in revealing the persistence of God's love for his own people. Dive in. Take a look. Leviticus 1, verses 1 and 2a read like this.
[7:25] The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, speak to the people of Israel and say something to them.

Now, I just want to stop on that for a moment. That opening line demonstrates the persistence of God's love toward his own.
He is still speaking. And in this sense, from the tent. Don't let that be lost on you. The people of Israel had most recently come out of fashioning a golden calf in utter rebellion to God's ways when he was on the mountain.
The people wanted to do their thing rather than his thing. And on the back of that, this holy, righteous, awesome, mighty, providing. God says, and you know what?
I still want to dwell with you. I still got something I want to say to you. I have a word for you. This opening phrase where we find God deciding to speak to his people is a gracious word that demonstrates the persistence of his love.
[8:42] It not only echoes their experience on the mountain. Can you imagine what it would be like to have so boldly gone your own way and yet now hear that God has something he wants to say?

They're echoes of the mountain. They're echoes of the mountain, but they're also echoes of Eden. These are the very words the Lord God called and spoke from.
But they're the very words not only of the mountain, but of Eden. And of Eden after Adam and Eve decided to go do their own thing. At that moment, when they were in utter rebellion, the Lord came to them in the cool of the day and had something to say.
God is persistent in his love for his own. And if that's an echo of the mountain and an echo of the garden, it ought to really be an echo that would encourage and give you hope.
Leviticus holds out hope for us. God does love us. God does pursue us. God, knowing us, is nevertheless intent on dwelling among us.
[10:04] God wants to speak to us. He is persistent in his desire for you to experience his presence. What an amazing book.

But exactly how this helps us and how this hope is confirmed to us. Well, that's what we're going to need to see.
Does God really love you? Perhaps you're asking that. Does God want to be with you? Is God still willing to walk in the cool of the day and speak to you?
Any word of grace for you? Where are you going today to know of his love? Where do we go to see him in our midst?
Where do we go to hear him speak as he spoke to Israel in the wilderness? This sermon, let alone this series, is going to fall short if those questions aren't answered.

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[11:08] But first, how was Israel supposed to draw near to God? How do they do it? They know who they are.

They know who he is. So how do they do it? How were they to experience his ongoing presence? What did it take for them to renew fellowship that had been broken?
Or would be broken as life continues to roll on for them? How would they restore their own lives when they had fallen? How do they find acceptance?
How would they know again that he approves of them rather than disapproves of them? How would they rejoice in prescribed annual festivals, which this book is going to get into?
How do you rejoice in prescribed annual festivals that celebrate an intimacy of relationship with God when that gets broken or strained all along the way?
[12:13] The answer starts right here, chapter 1. Burnt offerings. They had an advantageous outcome. Now, I hope you can hear the whole sermon in that little phrase.

This is how they did it. There were burnt offerings that had this advantageous outcome. The burnt offerings are there. Verse 3.
If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd. And it goes on. Next signpost. Verse 10. If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock.
And then it goes on. Or take a look finally at verse 14. If his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds.
Simple clarity emerges from an obscure reading. Burnt offerings. Threefold division.
[13:10] Were the means by which they could come back to God. Did you catch that? Let's take a look at it then.

I want you to see the purpose of the offerings. I want you to see how they were to present the offerings. I want you to see the plurality and what to make of that concerning the offerings.
All right? Just stay with it. What is the purpose of these offerings? There it is. Verses 3 and 4. If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd. He shall offer a male without blemish.
He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting. That he may be accepted before the Lord.
He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering. And it shall be accepted for him.
To make atonement for him. Those are the words. The purpose of the burnt offering is made clear through the words. Accepted and atonement.
[14:10] Acceptance. Through the burnt offerings. They were given divine stamp of renewed approval. By acceptance it means they were received.

Let me give you an illustration. Somebody comes to your door. Over the holidays. Somebody probably did. You hit your buzzer as I hit mine.
Who is it? I don't know if your buzzer system works in your condo or not. We just got ours fixed.
UPS. Need a signature. Open the door.
Down to the front. Out to the stoop. Man. Woman. In a uniform. Package given. Sign here. Accept this.
Receive this. The UPS driver is asking me to take delivery on this. But not only that.
[15:11] At times they want to know whether you're satisfied with the product that they delivered.
So you ordered a refrigerator. Or you ordered an oven.

And in came one of those companies to install it. Because you didn't know how to do the gas lines yourself. And there was a scratch on it. And therefore you did not take delivery on it.
Because you weren't going to accept it. You weren't going to receive it. What the burnt offerings are indicating is that when the offerings went up in the prescribed way.
God signed and said, yeah, I'm taking delivery on this. I am satisfied with this product. But God accepts the burnt offering in a way then that would be beneficial, advantageous to the one who offered it.
And did you see that word atonement? Very interesting word. I wrestled with it. It still hadn't wrestled me to the ground yet. It's a big one. Normally, I don't get beyond the semantic range that limits its meaning to a pardon for sin.
[16:25] To have atonement is to be pardoned for sin. In other words, these offerings would be a petition for sins committed. And he would look on the offering and, in a sense, atone.

It would atone for sin. But, in one sense, there are two different offerings we're going to see very closely in the next few weeks. There's a distinction between the burnt offerings, did you know this, and the guilt sin offerings.

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So the burnt offerings are broader than simply a sin offering, a guilt offering. Because the burnt offerings could be atonement in that you are seeking pardon.
But the burnt offerings could also be, just out of the goodness of your heart, an act of devotion, you wanted to praise the Lord with something that was the best in your life that you knew he had given to you to begin with.
See, this word involves times where you and I need to get right again with God, but it also involves times when we just want to give something back to God.
[17:41] The burnt offering, voluntarily made. It could stand as a substitute for sin. He that is the goat, he is me.

Pardon me. Take out the wrath that was due me as you have spilled the blood of what is before me. But it could also not just be a substitute for sin, it could be a gift.
God, this is for you. Not me. It's from you. Not me. The word conveys both. Therefore, the purpose of the burnt offering was twofold.
It was an expression of worship as well as expiation from your wrath, God. It was an offering of praise or it could likewise be a petition for pardon.
Such was the purpose. And God takes it and says, approved, received, atoned, right relationship restored, renewed, go forth.
[18:45] Sin no more. Well, you begin to see why they had to keep coming. You begin to see that you not only, those of you who are Christians, you not only needed Jesus to save you, you need him to walk with you.

If he's not standing at the right hand of the Father interceding for you, then there's no hope for you. You need to experience his presence daily.
You need to appreciate what he's done for you today. Not just the day that you gave yourself to him. Well, so much for the purpose of the burnt offerings. It's made clear there in 3 and 4.
What about the presentation of the offerings? How are they to be presented? Well, you begin to see it in the whole chapter, but I just want you to put your eyes on verses 3 to 9. Because that's where the first description comes.
It demonstrates how the offering was to be presented. And it gives some stipulations, just like case law would do. It says, on the basis of past outcomes, we now know how we relate to God.
[19:56] And so here it is. You're going to offer a male from the herd. That would be like a bull. Make sure it's a good one, not a bad one. Now, those of you who are just around for us in the book of Malachi already know that they got in trouble with God when they decided to say, you know what, he can take whatever.

I'm not going to give him my good one because that's my good one. That's my money-making bull. I'm not going to give God the bull that makes the money. I'll give him the one that's crippled over here. But what he says here is, no, no, no, no, no.
The distance between you and God is so great, it's got to actually be one without blemish. God's not putting up with your trash. You're not putting up with your trash. Why is God going to put up with your trash?
So it's got to be without blemish. But not only that, the offerer would bring it to the altar. Look at it. The words are before you. I hope you've got it in front of you. They would lay their hand on the head of the bull. The priest would kill the bull. The bull's blood would be thrown on the altar as a substitute for the sacrifice that the one was actually making.
[21:02] So let's say a thing about the altar. Do you notice it's in those verses 3 to 9? I looked at it this week five times, to keep you from having to count. Five times this activity is directed toward the altar. The altar.

The altar. The altar. The altar. Finally, after the fifth time, I said, I better go back and take a look. What is this altar? So I did a little looking back in Exodus, and I just rediscovered some things about the altar.
The altar was made of acacia wood, overlaid in bronze. It was sizable. It was actually seven and a half feet squared.
It had to be that large, I suppose, to get a bull on it. Now, the seven and a half foot squared altar of acacia wood, all connected in bronze, had internal horns on each end of it, also in bronze.
It had four rings around it. I'm guessing probably at about this height, so that it could be carried as they walked. So as they walked along in life, God walked with them, or they brought God with them

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wherever they went.
[22:13] Not only that, they had a grate. And the grate sat down inside the altar. This makes sense to me, a solo stove kind of guy. The grate sat down inside the altar at two feet, three inches.

So the sides were four and a half feet high. The square is seven and a half feet. The grate is inside at two and a half feet, probably an opening at the bottom so you could feed the fire in underneath the grate to actually burn the things.
And they were to make utensils, shovels, pans, all the things you see on TV with people that have real fireplaces. All the accoutrements to keep this thing going.
Not only that, two lambs were offered on this altar every day. One in the morning with flour, oil, and wine. One in the evening with grain.
The fire was never to go out. And God had said, I will meet with you there. The altar, this bronze altar, overlaid acacia wood, would be forever going up in the presence of the people as a way of having God go with us and us go with God.
[23:25] Not only that, but it says here that the blood was spilt. It was burned. And notice verse nine. It was burned wholly, like the whole thing.

This is the only offering that we're going to see that's like this. The rest of them in the book. Some of the offering you set aside for the priests, like his pay scale. Hey man, I know you got to get along too.
You get some of my offering. Some of the offering is set aside for various people. But the burnt offering, all God. Nobody else.
Full on complete. All to you. Amazing. This is how it was to be presented. It had a purpose.
There was a prescriptive way of presenting it. And notice, you can see it really clearly in verses 10 through 17, that there was a plurality of burnt offerings.
[24:25] Again, verse 10. If it's from the flock, that is a sheep or goats. Earlier, it had just been the bull from the herd. Or look even more interestingly at verse 14. If his offspring to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, then it's got to be turtle doves and pigeons.

Notice the plurality in kind. God would equally receive the bull as he would the goat, as he would the sheep, as he would the bird, the turtle dove, or the pigeon.
What's interesting, though, about these pigeons and turtle doves, isn't just that it was a plurality of kind, but in some sense, it was a plurality that paid homage to people's means.
Now, you've got to get this, because some of you have a lot of money, and some of you have a little money. Some of you have very little money. But God wanted to make sure that your access to God didn't depend upon how much money you had.
You didn't have to have a bull. So when Mary and Joseph come along, of course, we read that they offered turtle doves and pigeons, which is an indication they didn't have a lot of money. But for God, it wasn't how much you gave him.
[25:44] It was that you were giving him from the substance of what he had given to you. Or maybe you really wanted to give him something that even was beyond the measure that he'd given to you.

Well, he'd look on that, too, so that even the widow's might, two coins, copper, fall, temple, there. God says, she gave more than anybody. See, so God is accepting.
God is approving. God has actually built into the sacrificial system the means by which a socioeconomically diverse congregation can all stand in his presence.
Praise God. Therefore, let the rich man say, I am poor. Let the poor man say, I am rich. He distributes according to each, according to his own will.
But nobody is without acceptance to him. Thus, the plurality of the offerings is indicated by the kind of offering given and by the means that one could afford.
[26:47] Which then leads to the question. Say, I did all that. What would happen? Would God look on my fallen state, penitent, seeking renewal and restoration with him?

Would he take me back? Will he take you back? Presenting the burnt offering meant that all of Israel had the opportunity to draw near to God.
And I want to tell you this morning that everyone in this room can have, again, the ongoing approval of God. The ongoing pardon of God.
The ongoing ability to contribute from your own means to the praise of God. No one here is out of his reach or his hand, his reception, his signature, your satisfaction.

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I say that because the text at a literary level is clear. There's more here than burnt offerings. What did I tell you? It's burnt offerings that had advantageous outcomes.
[28:04] There it is. There it is. Three times over. Put your eyes on it. Closing line of verse 9. A pleasing aroma to the Lord.

Verse 13. A pleasing aroma to the Lord. The chapter closes. A pleasing aroma to the Lord.
Verses 9 and 13 and 17 make something clear. That God promises to receive what they did.
His promise is that it would be pleasing to him. I love those words. Let's sit on them for a moment.
Pleasing aroma.
An aroma that pleases. Some of you got some on this morning. You're supposed to laugh at that.
Some of you did. Trying to give you a breather.
[29:08] Trying to let you come up for air. I'm still going. I hope you can catch me. You know the fragrance industry is big business.

I'm going to sound like I knew this. But I just looked it up. But you know there are a couple. The big houses like L'Oreal or Cologne.
Cologne. Cologne. I did that on purpose. L'Oreal owns Armani and other brands. Others are owned.
Well others actually own the Tiffany's brand. Hugo Boss. Gucci. Calvin Klein. Did you know the expectations for 2025 on sales and fragrances?
Ready for this? Get it. $61.9 billion industry. I said some of you had it on. It's a big business.
[30:11] Why? What are we doing with it? What's happening? Why are we getting pleasing aromas? Well just think about it. We spend on this.

What's the outcome we're looking for? We want by putting on perfume to become pleasing in the presence of others. Let's just keep that straight too.
Some of you need some of this. That is what I'm trying to say. Or if you look at the marketing.
People use perfumes and fragrances to arouse someone else's interest in us.
We do it to be pleasing to others. To be presented as pleasing or to arouse their interest in us.
In the same way ancient Israel put on the burnt offerings which ascended before the Lord.
Remember the Lord that had come down on the mountain.
[31:15] The Lord that had promised I'm now in the tent of meeting. The Lord that said you started out with me but now we're going to set out together. I can't keep coming down on the mountain if we're not there.

You're going to make this tabernacle. We're going to have this box. I'm going to have this altar. And I'm going with you. And when I see the offerings that you give it will be pleasing in my sight.
It will be like fragrance rising. The worshiper was said to be acceptable to God. Access to the divine is given. Relational intimacy with God is restored.
Renewed. Sins forgiven. Devotion received. For an individual seeking ongoing access to God. If he or she would approach him. Get this.
With the acknowledgement of need. Otherwise why would you be sacrificing animals? With an acknowledgement of need. That our sin is so great.
[32:13] And that our life. And that the life we have is in the blood. And that the life is required of the one who sins against the holy God. The acknowledgement of need. As I bring my sacrifice as an Israelite.

Which is attended by faith. Not in my bringing it. But in his promise. God promised that this will be pleasing in his own sight. So the acknowledgement of need.
Attended by the promise of his own word. Taken by faith. Would have an unbelievably advantageous effect.
God would accept me. Atonement would be made for me. Now you got to get something straight here. What I'm trying to tell you is.
It worked. It worked. It worked. Now I know all you readers of the New Testament are going to say. No it didn't. No it worked. In the Old Testament. Those who acknowledged their need.
[33:13] Who looked to the promises of God by faith. And who trusted in his promises. And lived according to what he required. Knew that they weren't working their way to him through these. They indeed were received.

Because his promise was there. Now there's something that has to be said. We know this because the Bible's directives for proper worship are going to progress in the Bible.

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In other words the Bible is going to move on. If you keep reading it. It's going to move you beyond burnt offerings. If you're to keep reading the Bible. You're going to learn. That the offering of bulls and goats and turtle doves and pigeons.
Is ultimately insufficient in bringing you into his presence. But it was provisionally advantageous. And real. When offered in faith.
Which then begs the question. Should we start sacrifices? We've got a big platform.
[34:15] Three quarter inch oak. Well we'd have to cover that with bronze. I'm asking the question that we asked at the beginning. How do we know that God loves us?

Where do we go? Where do we learn of it? How do we get from this text to the application of your life?
Just give me three or four more minutes. Before you taste the application. When the desire came in the Greek speaking world.
To have a copy of Leviticus. In their own native language. They chose two specific words. That replicated the idea of a sacrifice. That was a pleasing aroma.
To the Lord. And those two words. Selected. When this work went into Greek. Are the same precise words. That Paul will pick up.
[35:24] As an apostle. In Ephesians 5.2. And make reference to his Lord. Where we read. Paul says. Walk in love.

As Christ loved us. And gave himself up for us. A fragrant offering. And sacrifice to God. The phrase in Ephesians 5.2. A fragrant offering.
Are the precise words. In his language. That they used. That they used. To refer to the fragrant offering. The pleasing aroma. In Leviticus.
Chapter 1. And Paul is saying. Walk in love. As Christ loved us. By doing this. Christ. Jesus. On the cross.
Offers himself. As a whole. Burnt sacrifice. The whole thing. Up to God. He gave himself. You know.
[36:18] You like to sing the song. I surrender all. No you don't. You don't surrender all. But he. Surrendered. All. Everything. He came.

Not only came down. But he. He descended. Into the grave. According to his death. And the shedding of his blood. As a sacrifice. That would atone. For your sins. That you don't have to keep going back for.
Once. For all time. Taken by faith. Acknowledge your need. Attended by faith in the promise. Confess with your mouth. Believe in your heart.
And you will be saved. Not only saved as a substitution from sin. But you will know the daily communion. Of walking with him. You'll come to him every day. And go. I love you today.
Because you still love me. You still speak to me. You still want me. You still embrace me. And you know me. Yes Lord. Hallelujah.
[37:14] Good. Oh. Yes Lord. His life blood. Yes. For our life. Amen. I invite you today.

Yes Lord. To seek Jesus for pardon. I invite you today. To come to Jesus for praise. Yes Lord. I encourage you today. To offer to Jesus.
Yes. Your lives. As a living sacrifice. Amen. There's nothing that you can do for him. Yes Lord. That. Well you can't do anything for him. Right. That's the problem with buying gifts for people that got everything. Yes Lord. You can't surprise them.
And you can't really get anything they need. But what Jesus really wants. Is just you. Amen. He's like. after they sinned in the garden, I wanted to come and say hi in the cool of the day.
[38:12] After they sinned at the mountain, I wanted to come and talk to you from the mountain. After you sinned in the wilderness, I had that tent of meeting up there because I still wanted communion with you, intimacy.

I want you to experience the presence of God. After Jesus came, he becomes that place to which you go.
He becomes that person who offers you life. He's the one that deserves not only you giving your life to him once, but giving your life to him every single day as an offering and sacrifice as praise.
Let me just get it as clean as I can and I'm done. Jesus is both, what Pastor Pace said earlier today, he is both the giver and the gift. He's the one who's offering the sacrifice and he is the sacrifice.

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He's the provider and your provision. He's everything. I want to tell you, if you don't know Jesus today, I invite you by faith to experience the love and presence of God.
[39:23] It was Passion Week. One of my heroes, Charles Simeon, was an undergraduate student in Cambridge and he became a Christian.

He wrote these words, that the Jews knew what they did when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering. The thought came into my mind, what?
May I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me that I may lay my sins on his head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer.
Accordingly, I sought to lay all my sins on the sacred head of Jesus. And then he says, on the Wednesday, I began to have hope of mercy. On the Thursday, hope increased.
And on the Friday and Saturday, it became more strong. And on Sunday morning, Easter day, April 4th, I awoke early with the words upon my heart and lips, Jesus Christ is risen today.
[40:23] Hallelujah. Hallelujah. From that hour, peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul. And at the Lord's table, at our chapel, I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.

I invite you to that table now. This table is open to anyone who professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who acknowledges their need is by faith believing in his promise that this offering is secured for you.
And you would then feast on him by faith who sits now at the right hand of the Father interceding for you and longing that 2025 would be the sweetest year of communion you would have with him ever. That you would not settle for what was, but you would take him for who he is. That you would sit long with him. For he has something he wants to say.
And he wants to dwell with you. Our Heavenly Father, we now come to the table. I pray that for those that haven't invited you into their life, they would confess with their mouth, acknowledge their need for a substitute, and by faith take you at your own word that at the death and resurrection of Christ, adequate payment for their sin has been made.
[41:48] And I pray for many here who already know you. I pray that this meal would strengthen them, protect them, nourish them. I pray in accordance with Simeon's words that they would have the sweetest access to communion with you.

Do it for us now. In Jesus' name.

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