Leviticus 2–3

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Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] And welcome to Christ Church Chicago. So glad that you're with us today, especially those of you who are out of town or visiting and looking for a local congregation in which your spiritual life might flourish.

We're praying that that would be the case here for you today. Be sure of this. I am praying this morning that we would grow a church that pleases God, not simply that I would preach a sermon that would please myself.
We want to grow a church that pleases God. I'm going to title my sermon from this text by way of a question. Here it is. Will you be coming to dinner? Let me say it again. Will you be coming to dinner?
Did you take in the aromas? The aromas wafting over the reading? The single idea that holds the two chapters together? Did you almost sense that God's voice is calling out to us from the kitchen? You know, you've heard the kind of voice rumbling down the hardwood floor of a condominium apartment or through the walls of a home. It's almost as though God is saying, all right, everybody, come on down. Dinner's ready.
[1:27] Did you put your eyes on it? By that I mean the four food groups. I don't know about you, but they're all there. Reminded me of the posters plastered on my grade school wall when we did the unit on health and nutrition.

25% grains, 25% vegetables, 25% fruits, 25% protein. Now, I know you've messed with the allocation since I was a boy.
But there it all was, even if you missed it when it was read. The grain offering and the peace offering. But within the grain offering, you had your breads as it were. But then in 14 and following, you had your first fruits. You had your fruits and your vegetables.
And in the middle, something about what you put into those along the way, what you did with leaven or not, and how much salt, which we'll come back to later.
The peace offerings, of course, were the protein, all the meat. The aromas, the offering brings us to the table. Will you be coming to dinner?
[2:44] Interestingly, this word offering, which came last week and now this week on both sections of the text, the grain offering and the peace offering.

This word offering is likened to the phrase, draw near. You're offering something. You're drawing near by that which you do.
The promise of the text is that we draw near to God as we wrestle with what he has to say here about dinner.
That you can actually, in 2025, experience God's presence, but it's going to have something to do with eating. You can find him, but it will be involved in food within his assembly.
And so let's take a look. If the promise is that we draw near to God and it has something to do with dinner, let's see the simple division of the text.
[3:49] The grain offerings. There they are. The first half of the text by my Bible, verses 1 through 16. 16. Just a cursory glance, even as you put your own eyes on it this morning, and I would encourage you to do it.

It talks about the grain that would be brought. And then in verses 4 to 10, it doesn't quibble with the means by which you're preparing that grain, does it?
It speaks of the oven and the griddle. It speaks even beyond that of the pan. I mean, it's almost as though God is looking for grain, flour finely put together, but whether you're going to do it on the stovetop or in the oven, well, he's not that concerned about that.

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Do it according to your own taste or pleasure or desire. And so the text moves from this idea of grain offerings to this open-handedness in regard to the means by which you prepare it.
And then in verses 11 to 13, just glance at it, you'll see no need of leaven. No need of leaven. No rising yeast in this recipe. Seems a bit odd for us, but there it is.
[5:09] But don't forget the salt. We'll come back to the salt. And then in addition to that, those breads, those grains, 14 to 17, the first fruits, and then it divides it up as though you've got some vegetables that you might be bringing or some fruits that you might be bringing.

I've only seen this happen in church once in my life. I was in upcountry, Kenya, Africa, many years ago. A little tiny church, really in the middle of nowhere.
Coffee grown along the mountains, but sparsely populated. We walked into the church and sat down. There were a group of us from our church here.
And it came time for the offering. And here you pass a bag and money goes in. Or if you didn't bring any money, you wave your phone to let the guy next to you know that you gave something online. But there it was a bit different. People came down. They came forward. Sugar cane. Laid it on the altar. An animal even down front.
[6:30] Something that someone had baked. And they left it there. I was puzzled by it all. But such were the offerings of the people that sustained and nurtured the family of faith.

Such was the pay of the pastor in that part of the world. And here we find the same things happening. There are two things I want to consider from these grain offerings.
Two hints in the text that need to be highlighted. I want to talk for a few minutes about the grain offerings in regard to their communal nature and the covenantal nature.
You got those two words. It was both a communal offering and a covenantal offering. By communal, I mean it wasn't just you on your own.
This was not coming home after work at 5 o'clock and throwing something in your microwave and turning on the TV or WFMT and being on your own. No, this was a corporate meal.
[7:43] You actually had to get up and get out of your house. Preparing something from your home and then bringing it. It was communal. You might almost say it was kind of like Israel's take on the modern day church potluck.

It was communal. You can see that there. Right there. I wanted to highlight it. Verses 3 and 10. I wanted to highlight it because I thought the text did. But, there it is, verse 3.
But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons. It's the most holy part of the Lord's food offering. This meal was not just one that you prepared for yourself.
Or, again, there in verse, where is it? 10. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons. It's the most holy part of the Lord's food offering.
Interesting. Interesting. This communal nature. This was a meal with church folk. Now, some of you like that.
[8:46] Some of you be like, man, that would be a nightmare dinner. But there it was. Even the priest got invited. Aaron and his sons.

Someone had prepared something at home, come to where they dwelt, the church meeting place, and presented in such a way that they shared what they had done with the church family.
Now, you need to know a couple of things. I mean, some things are better seen than said. And I felt that way this week looking at these 16 verses. What did this look like in real time?
You need to know that the 12 tribes of Israel, at least according to Numbers 2, lived in a neighborhood unlike ours. We have the beauty of a grid.
Chicago, you always know where you are based on the grid. In the ancient European continental world, things weren't laid out on a grid. The things were laid out with the chief architectural piece, normally the church, in the middle.
[10:01] And everybody was organized out from the center. So this circular nature. And in Numbers chapter 2, we see that when you would have brought your prepared meal to the church gathering, voluntarily and willingly on whatever day you desired you wanted to be a part of this, you would have to make your way from where you were living to it.

And interestingly, we learn that these 12 tribes were arranged out from the center, almost spoke-like. I mean, just look up at the dome.
You can see 24 architecturally ribbed sections of steel. Imagine every two sections is a tribe. You've got 12 units.

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And in the middle, of course, was the meeting place, the church. And they would bring their meal. You can visualize it now. Leaving your tent or your dwelling and having to walk through a number of people, the fullness of God's people, the neighborhood, as it were.
I mean, when they came to Egypt, there were only 70. It would have been easy to get around and know one another, kind of like what our church was a while back. But as the church began to grow and God's people had gotten out of Egypt, it says that there were probably over 600,000 people.
[11:18] So now this is a spreading metropolis. And it actually arranged the living by families and tribes. I mean, Judah was east of this tent of meeting.

Ephraim was to the west. Dan was to the north. Reuben's family was to the south. And the other eight tribes filled in between them.
So they didn't live in 77 distinct neighborhoods, but they lived in 12 distinct tribal family lines. Extended geographic community groups, if you would.
And they would think, well, it's time for me to make a grain offering. I voluntarily and willingly want to express my gratitude to God and share a meal.
And I'm thinking even of those who support the center of what our life is together. And so they would have to get out and make their way and walk under the banners of various homes and through dusty streets, make their way to the center such as it was.
[12:33] Can you envision it now? We're going to church today. I'm making something. Perhaps your neighbor is going to come along with you.

I mean, to the peace offering. Let's say you're offering a bull. I doubt you're going to down all that on your own unless you're part of the Meeks family that knows how to do meats in ways that finish it off in one sitting.
But here they are. They're coming and inviting. And when they arrive, it comes to the church, the grain, the meat, the offering.
Now, where did they go? What was in the center of this town? When you arrived with your grain offering, what did it look like? Now, last week I described the actual bronze altar that all these things would have been sacrificed on.
But you need to know that that bronze altar was actually encased, as it were, into an outer court. It had curtains eight feet high that were strung together through 60 pillars around.
[13:46] The dimensions were 150 feet by 75 feet. I mean, almost think of it as half a football field long and then running 75 feet and then back 150 feet into this rectangular space.

The entrance, well, you didn't come in anywhere you wanted. It wasn't like 12 gates later in Jerusalem, but one entrance, eastern side. And so you'd have to make your way, depending upon where you lived, along that curtain that you couldn't quite see over.
And you'd bring it to the entrance and the priest would be there. Well, in this sense, early days of the priesthood, just Aaron and his sons. I mean, in the text, they hadn't even been consecrated yet. But there they were, and he said, you know, I'm bringing my grain offering.
And they would receive some, and some would go to the priest. Why? Because this was a communal offering, community. This was an indication that I am part of something larger than myself.
Beyond that, you might actually see beyond the altar to the basin that they would wash their hands in. And beyond that, now that you're peering into the inside from the outer court, you see the tent of meeting itself.
[14:59] You see the place where God spoke to Moses from. You see something that's 45 feet long, 15 feet wide, 15 feet high, all encased in cloth. And the Holy of Holies within there that, well, we don't really go in there, but we're drawing near.

That's offering. We're drawing near to God by sharing in this meal with those who oversee the management of the household. I mean, our kids know this, so I'm just trying to catch you up on it. I don't know if you know this, but when they walk out that door, they're going downstairs, and they had two projects they could sign up for. They could either cross-stitch right now, some of them are cross-stitching, crocheting.
Tuesdays, when they come Tuesdays, they're going to be crocheting, so don't ask them what they did this morning. Pastor had it all wrong. You come Tuesday, they'll be crocheting, or they'll be making their own tabernacle.

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See, they're already beginning to visualize what I've just tried to show you. They're ahead of us, but that's okay. A little child will lead them. So here it is, the outer court, the inner court, the holy of holies.
[16:14] The meal is corporate. What I'm trying to say to you is that you draw near to God by drawing near to his people in the context of a meal. You want to experience God's presence in the coming year?

Will you be coming to dinner? Will you find ways in the coming year to not just eat dinner, but do so with his people?
Something strange must happen when that takes place. It's communal. In one sense, you could say the goal of life is just getting back to the dinner table.
Good things will happen there for you in the coming year if you take up, in principle, what they were doing here. It's not easy, though, is it?
Think about this. I want to apply this for a minute. The temptation for some of us is to become Christians who just go it alone.
[17:27] A lot of advantages to going it alone. Walking alone, sitting alone, standing alone, eating alone. Sometimes I prefer to be alone.

Get me on a plane after a long week of work. Sit me down next to someone. And I can read immediately whether they want something communal or not.
And if they want communal, I got my AirPods ready. I'm gone. I don't want to talk. In fact, some of us prefer the quiet.
Some of that's just by disposition, not right or wrong. But the risk that's required to experience the presence of God, the duty that's needed to draw near is going to not just be a spiritual exercise that you do something on your own, but Christianity is by nature a social exercise.
We've got to exercise that social muscle. Do you know the percentage of Americans who share a family meal? Well, I'm sure you're aware that it's declined. They give me these generations, the silent generation.
[18:42] I don't really know who that is, but they must be old if they're silent. Evidently, 84% of those people shared a family meal five days a week at least. Today, whatever generation we're down to, and you could tell me, but you don't need to, we're down to at least 38%.

Fewer and fewer people even know how to eat with one another. Let alone take the social risk of trying to go along with someone to where there's a shared meal in place.
What I'm trying to tell you is, if you want to experience the presence of God, you have to overcome the dispositional makeup of soul that would present you as a person who goes it alone.
There's something about our faith that requires opening yourself up to family.
Well, that might be enough for some people right there to call it a day. But our culture is paying a price for our lack of social engagement.
[19:46] Our city is paying a price for our lack of social engagement. The church has paid a steep price over the last five or six years for its lack of social engagement.

Spiritual rebirth is great, but social relationships are critical. That's what the grain offerings are showing. I was reading an article yesterday from the Wall Street Journal, a recent book by Owen Flanagan, a professor of philosophy and neurobiology emeritus at Duke.
He had tried to go through life alone, and he had picked up a lot of addictions along the way. You know, addictions are on the rise when isolation is preferred.
It becomes a coping mechanism. It was for him for some 20 years. He found his way out. But I was really interested because he didn't speak of his addictions in terms of a disease, but he called it a disordering of his life.
Not that it wasn't a disease, but he talked about it this way. He said, There was help from the wise parts of myself as well as from loved ones who still saw a space for a better, less disordered self and who kept trying over the years to articulate its possibility.
[21:23] Indeed, it was often the bare possibility of feeling and being better that kept the hope alive. With them, I was able to gain some control, some sense of order that I had either lost or couldn't find alone.

The solution was social. And if that's true, just on a human level, spiritually it's true. We need one another, and the grain offerings actually indicate that life was to be shared and the table was to be a place of refuge.

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I was thinking about this in regard to just our own lives together.
Somebody here today, probably a lot of you, took risk to show. You took a risk to walk in a door, to walk into an environment that purportedly is a family of which you're not sure you're even part of, but wondering whether this might happen.
I just want to say thank you for taking the risk. Thank you for being willing to walk alongside. Sometimes we who have been around a while just need to be able to look at people that you might not know.
[22:42] And you don't even need to know their name. You just need to say something like, hey, nice to see you. Do you mind if I join you today? You know, rather than say, hey, you want to come with me? No, I don't know who you are.

Can I join you today? Can I sit there today? I'm Dave, by the way. See, all of these things happen. They're all needing to be happening. We draw near by taking the risk of meals sitting in attendance with others who love the Lord.
Just remember that. Not only was it communal, but this thing was covenantal. I'm going to show this to you just two ways in the text. It was covenantal, and I know this because of these words, memorial portion, and what it talks about, leaven and salt.
Interesting little language here in verse 2. When they're coming, the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar. Same thing comes again in verse 9.
[23:55] He shall bring it to the altar, and the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn it. Same thing in verse 16. And the priest shall burn its memorial portion.

What's this memorial portion? What is it signifying about the grain offerings? Well, what's a memorial? A memorial commemorates an event or a relationship.
I mean, this is why gravestones are important. Memorial stones indicate when I stand in front of one who has passed on from my family in front of me that I am yet here before one who lived and I was in relationship with.
It's marked. The marker itself unites me to them. That's what a memorial does. It's meant to recall our minds to the life of the one we stand before, even though they're no longer standing with us.
In other words, it's a way of saying we're not here on our own. Something happened. Someone matters. And the memorial portion is actually covenantal then in that sense. It isn't just that you and I need one another.
[25:12] It's actually that we're remembering him as well. That is God. That God is in the middle of this thing. This is why, just let me sit on this.

It's very simple. But this is why I offer a prayer of thanksgiving before I eat. Not out of a ritual. And I'm...
Okay. If you say... If I'm at your house and you go, Pastor, will you bless the food? Believe me, I'll pray. But I don't think I'm blessing the food. The food already been blessed. You blessed it. I mean, you made it.
But I'm giving thanks for it. The memorial portion that not only went from the people and the priests, but to the altar and up, says that he's here.
God is in this as well. There's something three-dimensional in play. We're actually eating. And when we pray, thank you for the meal, we're not just inviting him to the table.
[26:16] We're recognizing that he is both provider, provision of the table, and that we want to do our life with him. That's what makes a Christian dinner so wildly fun.

People are sharing not just a meal, but an understanding that God is part of the link. He is the link in this relationship. We're acknowledging his presence in our midst.
That's what it's doing here in the text. We're inviting God to this, or we're indicating that God is already in this. Now, there's a couple of things you shouldn't forget about this communal meal, which is covenantal in nature.
And it's the lack of leaven and the presence of salt. You can see it there, right there, in 11 through 13. Why leaven? Why no leaven or honey?
And why salt? First, take the first. Why no leaven? I'm not exactly sure, but I don't think I'm standing on shaky ground to say that when they left Egypt, they weren't supposed to do their bread with leaven because it took time to do the leaven.
[27:28] And after 430 years, God finally showing up to save them, he's like, why are you wasting more time here? Let's get on with it. I've saved you.

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Now set out with me. So leaven was an indication of, man, maybe I just like the goodness of Egypt. Honey then could be, you know, not just what you left and you're supposed to get on with God, but honey, well, you're not in the land flowing with milk and honey yet.
You're not in heaven. You're not where you were. Just eat plain bread and keep this thing moving, although you get a little oil on it, you see. But the salt is fascinating to me. Three times over.
Take a look. 13. You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering. With all your offerings, you shall offer salt.
Salt. I'm kind of glad to see that. Evidently, God likes salt on his food. You're either asleep or you should have laughed because he wants a little pinch in every loaf of bread.
[28:34] I mean, the text almost reads like God's like Paul Holliday. Yeah, most of you don't know who Paul Holliday is. He's the king of bread. He's the guy on the great British baking show.

He's not making any bread without salt in it because he knows it tastes better that way. Is that what we're supposed to think of? That God is like just wants a pinch of salt? It'd be humorous and sad.
I mean, because a lot of salt is a problem today, right? So the World Health Organization last year said we're getting too much salt. Three times in the text, God says don't forget the salt. But we're living in a world where, you know, it's actually affecting us negatively, I guess.
We're supposed to have like 2,000 milligrams a day. I don't know how much that is other than it's only like a teaspoon a day. And we're doubling that or tripling it.
And as a result, we have all kinds of other issues. So some of us are in a physical way needing to restrict the salt. But there's something here about salt. But what is it about salt? What's the significance of the sodium?
[29:35] You know, is it just flavor? Is this like watching It's a Wonderful Life and the guy finally got a house and she brings a loaf of bread and salt? I mean, no, it's not flavor. God doesn't need any flavor. There's a better answer.

It's hiding right there in verse 13. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing. Salt is connected to his covenant.
I told you this is a covenantal meal. It's the same way in Chronicles when he talks about salt. It's related to covenants. So what is he saying?
He wants salt in the meal because it is a sign of the lasting longevity of this relationship. So when you're eating dinner with Christian friends and you're actually praying and thanking God for what's going on in the midst of it and for him allowing you to be together with one another rather than always isolated every meal, every night on your own, in your own place.
When you actually get the opportunity once a week maybe or maybe more, maybe less, to finally be with other people, to show up where all of that's taking place, it actually is also an indication that, you know what, it's a sign that God has a lasting covenant with us.
[30:53] He's not leaving us. It's a wonderful thing then. Salt signifies the nature of God's signature with you and me.

It's a way of acknowledging you're not eating alone, that we are sharing life in the presence of God. Let me put it as clearly as I can. You could have called this dining with God.
That's what this meal is. So I'm going to ask you this morning, are you going to prioritize this in the coming year? Are you going to begin to maybe think, maybe I'm supposed to order my life around recovering order as I take the risk of relationship and God's family and share a meal and see where this thing goes?
I'll be a lot quicker on the second half. The peace offerings. They start right there in verse, chapter 3.
The peace offerings are actually joined with the grain offerings because both are referred to as the food offerings. So this all moves really together.
[32:05] But you've reached the protein on the plate. What is meant by peace offering? I've been wrestling with that this week. At first I wondered, is this like making peace with God?

Am I offering something that atones for sin and it's peacemaking with God? Or is this peace in an expression of the relationship I already have with God? I mean, were they restoring something that had been lost?
Or are they just rejoicing in that which is? The key came in recognizing for me that there's nothing in this chapter about atonement. In fact, there's nothing until the next chapters, 4 and 5, where you

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talk about sin offerings and guilt offerings.
Things that need to be atoned for. And because there's nothing here about you need to get right with God as a peace offering. It's actually an indication of the peace you already have with God and with one another.
In other words, this meal then is entirely celebratory. It's a celebration. It's a so glad we are good with God.
[33:12] Not let's do this in order to get good with God. I'm not looking to get something from God. I'm indicating that we have received something from God. We're not brokering peace between adversaries.

We're actually passing the peace onto one another as a blessing. Now, you might know this if you've been in church worlds. There's something called the passing of the peace. I mean, you've got to be in like high flying church circles to know this now.
But in high liturgical forms of worship, they wouldn't come to you in the middle of the service and say, Hey, why don't you step out of your aisle and greet one another and say hi and catch up with someone.
No, they'd say, why don't you step out of the aisle and pass the peace. You would say to someone, good morning. Peace of Christ be with you and also with you. It's an indication that we have received his peace.
This meal, this offering is celebratory. We're not renewing peace. It's kind of like what Jesus does with John's disciples in the upper room after the resurrection.
[34:19] He appears mysteriously behind the wall. And what does he say? Peace be with you. Now, imagine meals where that's actually sensed.

Peace with you. God's done something for us, hasn't he? Can't wait to get into conversation over the meal. Can't wait to hear what he's done for you.
What has he done for you? What peace do we share? What peace do we already have? Not only was it peace like this, it was celebratory, but the peace offering was not self-serving.
That's the unique contribution here. Chapter 3, you can read it again this afternoon between football games. You should have laughed at that as well, but you're not with me this morning.
But between football games, you could see that you read this thing over again, chapter 3, and it is coming time and time and time again that all the fat belongs to God. You don't eat the fat.
[35:25] That's kind of a bummer. That's not going to be good for me and my ribeye when I get to Morton's. You know, you want the 7-ounce lean piece of meat or you want the bone-in ribeye.

If you're going 7-ounce lean, I do not have anything in common with you. But look at that. The end of verse 16, all fat is the Lord's.
Weren't supposed to eat the fat. Why? Why? Well, it was a portion that was meant for him. If you fast forward a few hundred years, Eli's sons, who are then the priests, when the people come with the meal, they actually take all the fat for themselves.
And they go, don't even cook it at home. You just bring the meat here raw. Why? Because they wanted to preserve the fat for themselves. All the fat was supposed to go to the Lord.
In other words, the table of the church family is desecrated and destroyed as people who attend the table are serving themselves rather than considering the Lord.
[36:38] This is so true. This is why Eli and his family had to be replaced. This is why the priesthood failed. It wasn't a failure of the people. They were bringing the sacrifices.

It was a failure of the clergy. And so finally, Jesus arrives on the scene, clears house, clears the temple, becomes the bread from heaven, becomes our meal.
He becomes the one. If you don't know Jesus yet, just keep coming. And he's kind of like hiding in the currents of this text of Leviticus.
But for here, he's revealed in this way, ungodly pastors take the best of the people for themselves. And Jesus would never do that to you or what you come to him for.
Paul then finally gets it right. He goes, I know I'm supposed to be able to get paid for what I do. I know that your offerings are perpetual due. I know that your offerings actually sustain my life as well.
[37:42] But I've decided not to make any use of these rights because I want more people to come to the table and the fellowship of the family of God. Let me shut it down.

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From Leviticus 2 and 3, if we are to experience God's presence in 2025, we will need to rethink our views on both church and the dinner table, on community and sitting with one another.
Drawing near to God will involve dining together. Drawing near to God will require ordering our lives around the center of our lives, that is the Lord Jesus Christ, and finding ways to sit and talk about the fellowship that we have in him.
Did you take in the aromas wafting from the reading, the single idea that holds these chapters together, God calling out to us, God inviting us, saying from the kitchen, All right, everyone, dinner's ready.
Come, sit, eat. Pull up a chair. Make sure he gets your RSVP.
[39:00] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this invitation to learn how to draw near to you and the strange nature that drawing near to you requires walking more closely with one another.

Give us that kind of fellowship. Make us that kind of church. We thank you, Lord, for each man, woman, or child who took great risk today to walk into social settings with spiritual significance, and I pray that they would leave with at least the hope, a tinge of hope, that the social construct of our life together would lead to a better, balanced, and ordered life that displays your glory.
And... ...

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