

Leviticus 10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2025

Preacher: Joe Pace

[0 : 00] Chicago, so glad that you are here this morning as we continue in our series in Leviticus. We come to Leviticus chapter 10 and we're drawing near to God and if I may just lift for a thought this morning from our text this morning. It is simply this, the cost of casual worship. The cost of casual worship. It's called a pinning ceremony and they were having one for my dad.

It's a formal military promotion ceremony that was marking my dad's promotion to chief master sergeant.

It's the highest enlisted rank in the Air Force. I received, while away at school, the formal invitation to the event with all the details on it, including instructions that the attire was supposed to be semi-formal. I took that to be more of a suggestion because after all, it was my dad that was being honored and surely I could wear what I wanted to.

So it's the day of the event. I put on some khakis and a nice shirt and some loafers. I wanted to be comfortable. I get to the venue on the base and there's a guard at the entrance and he says, I can't come in to the ceremony because of my attire. What? I was hot. Hey, that's my dad's ceremony and I have a right to be in there. You need to let me in. The guard says, no, you can't come in and dressed like that. Now understand there's also now a line of people behind me that are also trying to get in to the ceremony. Finally, frustrated, I tell the guard to go tell my dad who was already inside. Tell him I was out here and you better get ready because he's going to come out here and he's going to fix all of this and you're going to be very sorry. So the guard goes in to speak to my dad and a few minutes later, he comes back out by himself and says, your dad says, thanks for coming.

There's nothing. There's nothing. There's nothing he can do. See you back at the house. I was livid. I was heartbroken and I was embarrassed. Not only am I missing my dad's once in a lifetime ceremony, but he didn't come out to set this matter straight. Of course, when they got back to the house, I immediately confronted my dad. Well, I hope you had a great time without your son.

[3 : 44] How could you embarrass me like that? How could you leave me standing outside like that? My dad said, first, let me remind you that this ceremony wasn't about you. It was about me.

Though you tried to make it about you. You intentionally disregarded the instructions that had been given to you and decided to do your own thing. And you showed blatant disrespect and dishonor for this institution and the office that I was being promoted to. You should have been embarrassed. Today, there is a picture of my mom, my dad, my sister with his commanding officer getting his stripes.

A picture I will never be in. There was a steep cost for my cavalier treatment of such a sacred ceremony.

In our text this morning, we will find something similar, but even more devastating. Chapter 10 is one of the few stories or narratives in the book of Leviticus, albeit a tragic one.

[5 : 16] It's really a cautionary tale about what can happen when what is consecrated becomes common. When the secular tries to overtake the sacred.

When irreverent man encounters holy God. There's indeed a cost for casual worship. Worship. Worship. Why is this even important? Why is this so critical? Let me just briefly lay out this foundational statement of truth as we dig in.

The highest duty and privilege. The highest responsibility. The most essential behavior. The supreme responsibility for all humanity is to worship God.

The Westminster Confession, which you heard Pastor Helm mention in our call to worship, says to glorify God. It's the chief end of man. The father, according to John 4, seeks true worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

[6 : 31] Our text today provides us some important lessons. Indeed, it helps us to realize the gravity and the weight of that call as we seek to draw near to him.

If you've been following our series closely, you know that the first chapters of Leviticus detail the five sacrifices that undergird this sacrificial worship system.

In the next chapters, we have the instructions for the priest to mediate or administer this system. Then in chapters eight and nine, as you heard last week from Brother Milton, we have the ordination, consecration, and installation of the priesthood.

And now in chapter 10, we see the deadly mistake the priesthood will make in worship and God's righteous response to it.

Let me just read verses one and two again to you because quite a bit of the drama is right up front in the beginning of this story.

[7 : 44] Now, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them.

And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them and they died before the Lord. Wow. Well, no cliffhanger here.

We know exactly who the victims are. We know exactly how they were killed. And we don't have to wait weeks to find out who did it. Nadab and Abihu, we have seen those names before.

They were the nephews of Moses and the two oldest sons of Aaron, the high priest. They had been groomed for leadership ever since they had come to the mountain of God.

They had the priesthood by inheritance. They were honored among the people. They were respected. These two men had a legacy of great spiritual encounters.

[8 : 52] They were firsthand witnesses, seeing with their own eyes the many remarkable things that God had done. They saw all the miracles God did in bringing Israel out of Egypt.

They were among the privileged few who went up with Moses and Aaron and the 70 elders for a special meeting with God on Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 24.

They would have seen God's judgment from that little golden calf party incident. But despite all these remarkable firsthand experiences, Nadab and Abihu fell hard.

And they were put to death for offering unauthorized fire. Come on. You ask, what exactly did these guys do so bad that they deserve the death penalty?

I mean, we're almost tempted to feel sorry for them. But before you do, we must realize that their sin was blatant disobedience to God's command.

[10 : 03] So exactly what was their sin? Well, outside of unauthorized fire, it's not specifically laid out here, but there are a couple of observations we can surely make.

First, they took their censers. A censor is a vessel used for burning incense. And perhaps they got their fire from some source outside of the altar.

There was a holy altar in front of the tent of meeting, and they were supposed to receive the burning coals and the fire from that altar.

So maybe they got the wrong fire. Then perhaps they went into the wrong place, which later Leviticus chapter 16 seems to support.

Only once a year on the Day of Atonement were the high priests to enter into the Holy of Holies. So maybe it meant that unauthorized fire means they presented this sacrifice in the wrong place.

[11 : 09] There's maybe even another aspect of their sin. Notice these strange instructions in verse 9. This seems to be out of the blue that the Lord speaks to Aaron.

It's not an absolute prohibition against alcohol for God's people or the priests, but here, when they are to handle holy things, they're to take no wine or strong drink.

Well, it likely seems that he gives this instruction in part because this was a sin of Nadab and Abihu. They had been drunk in handling the things of the Lord.

So you put it all together, and I only belabor this point so you can understand this was not simply an oops moment, Brother Edward. This was an offense by two men who sinned egregiously when they should have known better.

Their sin was probably a combination of all these things, and the Lord said, this is unauthorized fire. This is not what I have prescribed for the priests.

[12 : 35] It's also important for us to remember that the events of Leviticus chapter 10 occur in the midst of the very first administration of the priestly sacrificial system in the history of Israel.

This kind of helps put it in perspective why God's response to the sin of Nadab and Abihu is so decisive and seemingly so severe.

This is their first day on the job. The very first day of administration of the Levitical priesthood, which will point to Christ, and already sin has crept into the administration.

They say it's not how you start, but how you finish. But obviously how you start is very important to God.

We see the same thing in the New Testament in the early days of the church in Acts chapter 5, with Ananias and Sapphira who were struck down, one independently after the other, for lying to God.

[13:49] And God said, no, we are not going to start like this. So here it is. In the afterglow of the consecration experience, which Nadab and Abihu were a part of in chapter 9, these two sons of Aaron sought to connect with God in their own way, doing their own thing, apart from the specific instructions God revealed to Moses.

The same fire that displayed God's glory back in chapter 9, now showed God's judgment against these unfaithful priests.

Church, this is a heavy thing, that fire can come out from God in a way that displays his pleasure and his presence, but can also come out from God in a way that communicates his displeasure and his judgment.

The same fire that says, I accept your sacrifice and I approve of this priestly system, now says, I will not accept your man-based fleshly attempt to imitate my fire.

Church, there's a huge difference between fire kindled by God and fire conjured by man.

[15:13] There is a cost for casual worship. We must take care as pastors, as leaders, as a church that we don't come before the Lord with strange fire, or in a way that just pleases us or just seems to want to make a big splash, but we come in a way that is honoring to God and is truly according to his word.

Alexander McLaren says it this way, Our censurers often flaming with strange fire. How much so-called Christian worship glows with self-will or partisan zeal.

When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into his presence with hot, eager desires, which we have not subordinated to his will, we are burning strange fire, which he has not commanded.

As you look at verse 3, then Moses says to Aaron, This is what the Lord has said. Among those who are near me, I will be sanctified.

And before all the people, I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. The Lord is basically saying here, Yeah, yeah, it was me. I did it.

[16:35] And this is why, one way or the other, I'm going to be sanctified. And I'm going to be glorified. And I know, Aaron, you don't have anything to say about it.

In other words, church, here it is. Here it is in a nutshell. Here's the big reveal. Let's really sum this up. Everything I've said up to this point, just three words.

God is holy. Those who come near to God must regard him as holy. God demands it.

This is not Burger King, where you can have it your way. You can't do your own thing in his presence. That's just not going to work.

Look, God is a loving father. He loves you. He cares for you. He's concerned about you. And he's concerned about what concerns you.

[17:36] But you must respect him and treat him as holy. I vividly remember hanging out with my dad.

I couldn't have been more than 12 or 13. We were having a great time, great conversation. We were laughing and joking. And we were talking about what my mom's reaction was going to be to something we were trying to do.

And I was feeling good. So I just sort of tongue in cheek said, I don't know, dude, because you know how crazy your wife can be. And the same man that was just laughing with me turned on me and said, hey, who do you think you're talking to?

I'm not one of your little friends that you can just talk any way you want. I'm your father. And that's your mother you're talking about.

And then, as we parents sometimes do, he makes this completely profound but contradictory statement. And he says, now I'll play with you from time to time, but I am not to be played with.

[18:54] Okay, we can play, but I can't play. I'm confused. I don't, do we play or don't we play?

But I knew what he meant. Somewhere in this conversation, I got a little too common. And I crossed a line.

We can come to God just as we are. Sure we can. But you can't come any way you please. We must come to God in the way he has provided.

And in light of the new covenant, that way is provided by Jesus Christ, by his sinless life, by his sacrificial death, and by his glorious resurrection.

This morning, if you haven't, you can still come to Jesus this same way. He's already done the work. All you have to do is repent and give your life to him.

[19 : 54] I'd love to talk to you about that after service. That's how we come to God. There's one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

There's no other way. And that's why God says, I must be regarded as holy, holy, holy. He's holy. He's not the sun. He's not the moon. He's not the created. He's the creator. He's not one of the gods. He's the only God. He's not competitive with other gods.

He's the only God. He's exclusive. He's essential. He's exceptional. God is holy. This also reminds us, church, that God must be glorified in the meetings of his people.

When his people come together for worship and the word, the focus must not be on man. The focus must not be on human cleverness or human insight or human ingenuity.

[20 : 57] Those who fail to glorify God will not be rewarded by God. Maybe they'll be rewarded with lots of clicks or views.

Maybe they'll be rewarded by lots of followers on social media. But they won't be rewarded by God. God says, I must be glorified.

If the church is to fulfill its glorious mandate, then it must obey God's prescription for worship. His weight must draw us to his word, and his word must draw us to his weight in worship.

How about you? Have you ever come to worship with your own agenda? Have you ever gathered in worship with God's people and yet came with a heart hardened to his commands?

Or are you one of those that worships God as if God is Santa Claus? Always just wanting us to be happy.

[22 : 04] Never over confronting us about anything. Always overlooking everything. Never demanding anything. I say to you this morning, check your fire.

Because there's a cost for casual worship. What is the cost? What is the cost? Well, the cost for you and me may not be as immediate as what happened to Nadab and Abihu, but the consequences can nonetheless be dire.

Maybe it's spiritual with a hardened heart and lack of power. Maybe it's right here in our church where the worship becomes compromised and spiritual decline or division begins to set in.

Maybe it's personal with a lack of growth and a heart that becomes more susceptible to false teaching. Ultimately, maybe it's eternal where judgment and rejection comes because those who think they are worshiping worship with their lips, but their hearts are far from him.

There is a cost. Now in verses 4 through 11, we see the immediate aftermath of this remarkable demonstration of God's judgment.

[23 : 23] Aaron has just tragically lost two of his sons, and their cousins had to come take the bodies out because as priests, Aaron and his remaining sons couldn't come into contact with a dead body or they'd be rendered ceremonially unclean.

And on top of all that, Moses doesn't come to Aaron and say, man, I am so sorry for your loss.

I just can't imagine what you're going through right now. No, Aaron says, Moses says to Aaron, you are not to mourn or grieve the death of your sons.

Can you imagine that? Aaron, you are not to engage in public mourning. Aaron, you are not to mourn. The rest of your extended family, they'll mourn.

Israel, as a congregation, they'll mourn. But Aaron, if you mourn, it will call into question the righteousness of God in his judgment against your sons.

[24 : 30] And it would somehow indicate that maybe you thought God was wrong in what he did. get this get this god is actually saying at this moment aaron the respect for my holiness is more important than your right to grieve we just went through a great study last week at tuesdays together with pastor being about grief but here in this text god is saying in fact that what is more grievous on this day than the death of your sons is that my name has been profaned and my holiness disregarded your son's disobedience was actually more tragic than their death there is

indeed a cost for casual worship here now in verse 8 the lord speaks for the first and only time to aaron directly in leviticus because he needs him to hear this instruction in verse 10 as bad as all this is as tragic as this story is he reminds aaron not to lose sight of what they're called to do you are to distinguish between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean and you are to teach the people of israel all the statutes that the lord has spoken to them by moses don't lose your focus i know you're hurting i know you're going through i know you want to grieve i know you want to scream i know you want to cry i know there are a lot of things going on with you right now but don't lose your focus i'm still sovereign i'm still holy i'm still in control i'm still on the throne you still have a call and a job to do starting now in verse 12 moses comes to aaron and reiterates in light of recent events what the rules are with this sacrificial system you all have seen it at least three times already in leviticus twice chapters one through seven and again in chapter nine and now moses says okay just one more time let me rehearse for you what god's commands are for you as priests to do moses then comes back to check in on things in verse 16 and is stunned by what he sees now simply put the priests are supposed to eat what's remaining of these peace offerings and these sin offerings moses is afraid that aaron and his sons have messed up again because they burned the goat from the sin offering instead of eating it moses is livid he says why didn't you eat it what have you done have you not learned anything from nadab and abihu you know the law you're supposed to eat the offering after it's offered aaron responds in verse 19 today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offerings before the lord and yet such things as these have happened to me if i had eaten the sin offering today would the lord have approved aaron is saying wait a minute we've we've had this great offense today and my sons committed this sin and perhaps i've also in some way been made unclean because of the sins of my sons and so that's why i didn't eat the offering and i think we've had enough death for one day with all that's happened today i'm in no position to eat this sacrifice we know from verse 20 that moses heard that explanation and

he approved and we can only surmise that the lord also approved amazing grace even in the midst of judgment this helps us as we must approach god in worship with reverence humility and awe that forces us to pay careful attention to the doctrine and the gospel that we preach and believe in leviticus 10 you bring the wrong offering you bring another offering that god did not command and you are struck down but unlike leviticus 10 the implications of casual worship for us are even greater now because we have jesus and we have the gospel so part of the offering that we bring now on the other side of the cross christ fulfilled is not the sacrificial system with a censor filled with incense no it's the very proclamation or the displaying as our vision statement says the living out of the gospel the gospel nadab and abihu were guilty of adding to god's word they were guilty of human innovation in worship and god rejected both it and them just a quick note how how was it all rejected yeah we know it was rejected through the sudden death of nadab and abihu but it is critical to keep in mind that even more broadly and much more importantly hebrews 7 tells us that ultimately aaron and the entire priesthood itself was not going to be enough to get it done for you and for me we're going to need better representation there had to be another high priest from outside this system and this lineage to get it done his name is jesus christ glory be to god stay with me for a moment in hebrews hebrews 12:28 says therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to god acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our god is a consuming fire surely the writer of hebrews has leviticus chapter 10 in his mind let us offer to god not like nadab and abihu who offered unauthorized fire but let us offer to god acceptable worship worship that comes in the name of christ with reverence and awe why because we know from the text our god is a consuming fire fire god is just as concerned with acceptable worship today as he was then in the old testament having said that here's a quick thought let me let me say at many times we are tempted to drive past passages like this indeed books like this and just get to jesus as quickly as we possibly can and that is the correct destination question then and he has a purpose plan and path he wants you to walk now our worship today mirrors the worship uh back then in this one inescapable sense it's the profound awareness that god is holy and we are not that's how we should approach a holy god as i close growing up in our house dr meeks we had what was known as a formal living room it had my mother's white furniture in it and as kids we knew we weren't allowed in it it was carpeted and it had those seemingly permanent vacuum lines that were in the carpet so you knew if anybody walked in there it was a room we couldn't come in and play around in why lord help me because the furniture in there was expensive

jesus there there was a high cost that was paid for that furniture and you dare not just casually run in there and plop yourself down on it uh this is why church this is why we have to be careful about casual worship because the object of that worship is holy uh it dishonors discounts the high price that was paid on that furniture called the cross for our salvation it was a price that no bull no ram no goat no ox no turtle dove no pigeon could pay but it took something else it took a lamb a holy lamb to get it done behold the lamb of god which takes away the sins of the world church let's draw near with confidence in christ for he alone entered the holy place that we may come and have eternal access to our holy god let's pray together father we thank you for being holy forgive us oh god for those times when we've treated you casually or in a common manner or common way god we acknowledge who you are and we acknowledge what you've done for us through your son jesus christ and so god may we have a renewed commitment and renewed sense and reverence and awe for you who you are and what you've done thank you for now being our high priest who's paid the cost for us to have eternal life we love you it's in your son's name we do pray and give thanks amen let's stand together