

Leviticus 24

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[0 : 00] Good morning, welcome to Christ Church Chicago.! Let me allow us or allow me to pause and pray as we turn to the Bible together.

! Father, we now come to hear the words of the living God, words of a man, words of a man, words of a man.

And we're reminded of what the psalmist has told us, that you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

Above all, your name and your word. And so now we gather under your name, sitting under your word and ask for your help.

Give us ears to hear, loosen my stammering tongue to tell of thy love, immense, immeasurable. Go with us, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[1 : 07] Well, we return to the book of Leviticus this morning, a series that we commenced at the start of the new year. We're nearing the end, just a few weeks.

The book has given us a glimpse of the forging of a new people, a new nation, taken from Egyptian slavery to become a people where God would dwell among them.

No other people in all the world had such a privilege. The holy God doesn't just simply settle anywhere. Among the people of Israel, he would dwell.

We learned, we have learned, it required a holy institution, a sacrificial system that would ensure ongoing worship. It required a holy priesthood, a class of people that would serve and instruct the people.

It required a holy place, a home for the presence of God among the people. A few weeks back, we saw it required a holy calendar, the allocation of time and life rhythms that serve as markers for the people.

[2 : 23] God was establishing his kingdom on earth, and it required the reordering of lives of how his people were to live.

In other words, Leviticus records for us what is required for God not only to draw near to his people, but to remain on his people. What does it look like to live in light of God's presence?

It ought not only to shape our calendars, but also our conduct. God's ongoing presence transforms our conduct.

It makes sense, because those you spend the most time with inevitably change how you live.

Those, it is all the more true of God, his presence influences our conduct.

And we'll see that this morning. Those who experience God's holy presence will be those who honor God's holy name. Those two banners.

[3 : 33] Experiencing God's holy presence. Honoring God's holy name. Well, God had just given his people an annual religious calendar on the heels of chapter 23.

Weekly, they were to set aside a day. They called it, we call it a Sabbath, a day of solemn rest.

They were to be distinguished from all other people in all the world, not by their productivity, not by their achievements, not their workaholicism, but they would be distinguished by one day a week of inactivity.

A day that they would observe unto the Lord. It would be an act of obedience and worship. They would commemorate Passover. On the 14th day of the first month, they would have the feast of first fruits, followed by the feast of weeks, the feast of trumpets, the day of atonement, and the feast of booths or tabernacles.

All in all, it comes to about 20 days a year. The nation would be recognized, the people would be recognized by the holidays they kept and celebrated.

In other words, it would be clear who the people of God were by the calendar they kept.

[4 : 55] Being human, we know that you and I might know the tendencies of the human heart. 20 days a year? One day a week? Oh, I could do that. Check. Check.

I could check those off. That's all? That's all that's required? Well, maybe I'll just be one of those, I learned this term last week, these Christers.

I was like, what's a Christer? It's an individual that just attends on the holiest days of the Christian calendar, Christmas and Easter. The two days a year they come and they are Christers.

And I said, that's interesting. But the sweetness of being a Christian does not come on just two days a year or 20 days a year or one day a week.

The sweetness of being a Christian or part of the people of God is that we could experience God's presence daily. It comes from the comfort of knowing that every waking moment God is with you.

[5 : 57] It comes from the joy of knowing that even while you're sleeping, in your sleeping moments, God is preserving you. And this is the significance of the lamp and the loaves in verses one to nine.

See, God's people are shown the reality of experiencing God's holy presence continually. Allow me to explain. The writer gives us the words in verse one, The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Command the people of Israel, the people of Israel, to bring you pure oil from bean olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

As we enter into chapter 24, the writer wants us to know that as the feasts and the celebrations have subsided, the writer wants to make it clear that even though the festivals and holy convocations have ended, worship in the tent persisted every single day.

The lamps were to be burned regularly from evening to morning. This is a forever statute, according to verse three. The lamps were to burn continually.

In addition to the burning of the lamps, there was to be this ongoing baking of 12 loaves of bread.

Fine flour was taken, 12 loaves were emerged from it, and the two piles of six would be brought into the holy place, and they would rest upon a small gold table.

[7 : 35] Frankincense would either be sprinkled on it or set next to the loaves of bread. But it would be done every Sabbath day, weekly. Each week, the old loaves would be collected and then given to the priests for their consumption.

The Bible says every Sabbath day, Aaron shall arrange it before the Lord regularly. It is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever.

The lamp and the loaves, the lighting and the baking signify this unending relationship between God and his people.

Now imagine this with me. Little Billy, growing up on the outskirts of the camp of Israel, sees mom and dad fill a jar with oil.

Pure oil. Shortly afterwards, little Billy sees mom and dad load a large sack of fine flour. And he asked, what are these for?

[8 : 41] To which mom and dad would reply, well, the oil is to keep the lampstand burning. What lampstand? The lampstand in the most holy place.

The pure gold lampstand that is about eight tall, with six branches that come off of it, that would illumine seven burning clovers of sorts.

No. Well, how long does it burn for? All the time. Every moment of every day, it burns.

Evening to morning, it burns. And it's our turn as our family to participate in the persistent worship of God.

And we're bringing the oil this week. And we're bringing the flour. Well, what's the flour for? Mom? Dad? Well, there are 12 loaves of bread.

[9 : 43] You see, if you walked into the holy place, this tent, you would pull back this curtain, no windows. You would walk in and it would be dark. And on your left would be this lampstand burning, illuminating.

And on the right, a pure gold table. And on that table, little Billy, there are 12 loaves of bread, two piles of six. Well, what's that for?

Does God need to eat? No. No. God doesn't need to eat. Well, why the number 12? Because God provides food for all his people, all the 12 tribes.

Well, this doesn't make sense, Mom, Dad. Because if you walk into this empty tent, there's no one in there. Why do we leave the lights on? Well, why do the candles need to keep burning?

And you know, when we go to bed at night, we blow out the candle, not to waste the oil. And they would say, oh, little Billy, you don't know. No human lives there.

[10:49] But God is in there. And his light shines perpetually, continually, as if to illumine the 12 loaves of bread.

The people. You see, I lift my eyes up to the hills. And where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the who made heaven and earth.

He would not let your foot be moved. And this is it. He who keeps you does not slumber. You know why we don't blow out the candle, little Billy?

Because he who keeps you does not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. And so there is the picture.

A small, intimate tent under the glow of seven lamps. You see and smell the altar of incense. And before it, 12 loaves of bread illumined by the lamps, as if to say, I am with you, watching over you.

[11:54] In the language of the Aaronic blessing, my face is shining upon you and giving you peace.

There you have it as you walked in. The light of God's face shining upon the people of God.

Forever, perpetually, continually, never ending.

Ongoing worship. With purity, regularity, continuity, perpetuity. I thought that was a great line.

The people were invited to participate in this daily duty of worship. Bring your oil. Bring your flour.

Certainly, there's 20 festive occasions throughout the year.

20 days. Certainly, the weekly Sabbath. The pause of work and the taking up of worship. And significantly, the daily, regular, continual commitment of entering to experience the presence of the Holy God.

[13:06] The people of God were known by the calendar they kept. And when the festivities and the parties and the week-long celebrations ceased, the people of God were to know that God's presence persisted in the daily and regular happenings of their lives.

His presence never ceased. His presence never ceased. It would never be withdrawn. And by their contributions of pure oil and fine flour, and through the priesthood, this relationship, this ongoing relationship with God was tended to, cared for, and facilitated.

By their participation, the people of God's participation, they experienced God's holy presence continually. Continually.

Continually. Being with God changes you. It changes your conduct and character. Continually. And so now, as we come to the second half of this chapter, verses 10 through 23, there's a lot of explaining I need to do.

As the presence of God accompanied his people, as this backdrop lays on the scene, verse 10 unfolds.

[14:31] It's very significant, verse 10. Why? Because there is only one other part of the entire book of Leviticus, where the author moves out of the ceremonial and legal instruction and gives you this narrative.

He tells you a story, a true story. The first one came in chapter 10. With the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.

They offered strange, unusual fire before the Lord, and they profaned what was holy. As a result, God, because they disobeyed God, failed to give heed to his instructions.

They were consumed by the fire of the Lord. At the cost of their lives, they paid the steep price for engaging in casual and irreverent worship.

They disregarded God as holy. And now, here's the second story in the entire book. I'll just read a portion of it again.

[15:38] Now, an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel. And the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought in the camp.

And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name and cursed. As a result, they put him in custody, verse 12.

There's a holding place, it appears, until the Lord decides what to do with him. The verdict is pronounced in verse 15.

Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. And the conclusion of the story is there in verse 23.

So Moses spoke to the people of Israel. They brought out of the camp the one who had cursed and stoned him with stones. What does this story mean?

[16:45] Why is it here? There's so many questions we need to ask. But there's a few things we need to remind ourselves of. We have seen that all things associated with God are demarcated by holiness.

God is holy. It's not just a moral quality, it's a divine quality. Anything that engages with God requires holiness. Without it, no one will see the Lord.

There's a holy office in the priesthood. There's a holy place in the tabernacle, in the tent of meeting. There's a holy time in the calendar and weekly, as we have seen. Holiness is expected from his people.

And all of this was established to require God's people to dwell with him. Well, this episode doubles down. Reinforces this reality of treating God as holy.

Because the violation is disregard for his name that is holy. His name is holy.

[17:52] His name is holy. It has been argued that actually all of the Leviticus is reaching this pinnacle. You want to talk about holy spaces, we can talk about holy spaces. You want to talk about holy people, we can talk about holy people.

You want to talk about holy calendars, we can talk about holy calendars. But it's all leading up to this one thing. Get this right. His name is holy. His name is holy.

His name is holy. Now, if you're... He is the great I am and his name will not be disrespected, profaned, or blasphemed. He would not be publicly shamed or dishonored.

And if you're a student of the Bible, you know this. Because you know maybe the Ten Commandments. And you know Commandment 3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. And so the question emerges, well, what did this guy say? What's happening here?

[18:57] What? Is it just profanity? Well, there's a few layers here. To profane God's name is to treat it as common. Oh, he's just like Bing.

No, he's not like Bing. He's nothing like Bing. Oh, he's like Joe. Or Dave. No. He isn't. It's no common name.

Up to this point, it has been prohibited and mentioned quite a few times. You might have missed it as we've tracked in Leviticus. But actually in 22. Leviticus 22.

In Leviticus 21. Leviticus chapter 20. Leviticus chapter 19. Leviticus chapter 18. The refrain is all there. And I'll just point you to one. You could just flip one page back in your Bibles.

But Leviticus chapter 22, verse 32. I'll read verse 31 because it helps. You shall keep my commandments and do them. I am the Lord. And verse 32.

[19:53] Here it is. And you shall not. You shall not. Profane my name. And if you're doing a word search, you could go look at it in the previous chapters.

Beginning in chapter 18. You cannot profane my name. And here we see. Chapter 24. This is why the story emerges.

Well, let's just say something happens. And what happens? Well, we see the name profaned, treated as common and blasphemed.

The account is quite short. It lacks so much detail. But the lesson is clear. And let me make a few observations. Interestingly, the blasphemer is left nameless.

He is, for the author, it's important for us to know that he is the offspring of a mixed marriage. His mother is an Israelite. His father is an Egyptian.

[20:53] And what gets you and I probably, or what got me reading it, is he doesn't get in trouble for fighting. Right? Right there. And he goes out into the camp and he fights a person.

You would think that's what would get you in trouble. Because if the principal called me in to their office and said, well, your son or daughter was actually, you're called into the office because your child was amongst his or her classmates acting in this way.

They were brawling, engaging in fights with others. But that's actually not why I called you in today. While they're fighting, it was heard, your child cursed God and took his name in vain.

And used God's name to demean or belittle or denigrate a classmate. We want to have a conversation about this. And you're like, what about the fighting?

I thought we were here for that. No. It's shockingly the charge is not associated with the brawling, but with the blasphemy. What was this blasphemy?

[22 : 08] What was said? Well, you like me, want to know because it's unsaid. Could it, could this person, this individual simply utter the divine name?

And some of us may be aware that if you have Jewish neighbors speaking, the divine name is prohibited. You read it. You might read it in the Hebrew Bible.

And if you see it there, you'll be like, oh, that's pronounced Yahweh, Yahweh. But if you ever read the Hebrew Bible aloud with someone who knows these things, they'll get to the word Yahweh and they'll pronounce it Adonai.

Which means the Lord. Or they'll pronounce it Hashem, the name. Jewish readers honor the name so highly, they will not even say it.

Is this what he did? Probably not. It seems way more than this. And commentators have suggested a few things and it could take a range. It can be a range of taking the Lord's name.

[23 : 24] It could be simply a cuss word. And I'll say it. God damn it. It could have been simply that.

Using the names Lord. It could have been you taking the name, the name of the Lord and pronouncing it like a curse. I curse you in the name of the Lord.

It would have been taken whatever was spoken. It would have been taking that which was holy and treating it as if were common. Irreverence, mockery, derision.

We don't know what was said, but we do know the outcome. The individual was taken outside the camp similar to Nadab and Abihu, similar to the goat in Leviticus 16.

These three characters, Naab and Abihu the goat, and this unnamed individual were all taken outside the camp. Hands are laid on this person, possibly attesting to that we witnessed this, we heard this, or we're saying we represent the community in that we charge him as guilty.

[24 : 35] And the verdicts pronounced guilty of the crime. Stoning ensues and death results. On that day, the people of God learned that to blaspheme God was to be a capital crime.

Amongst Israel, whether a sojourner, the text tells us in verse 16 and again in verse 22, whether a sojourner or native, it didn't matter where your citizenship was.

The law would be clear. God's name was holy, and if it were treated with contempt or blasphemed against, it was to be punished by death. And you see this throughout the Bible.

Job, in his suffering, his wife says, just curse God and die. You see it in the New Testament.

Jesus, one of his accusations against Jesus was he blasphemed God. He deserves to die. Stephen blasphemed the Lord.

[25 : 46] Therefore, he was stoned. When instructing on prayer, Jesus' opening line was this, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

The name was to be revered and treated as sacred and holy. Holy is his name. And perhaps what is shocking is how this text concludes. There are two offenses within the community that incur the death penalty.

Get this, two here in this text. It applies to both the sojourner and the native. And these are the two violations. You blaspheme the name, you die. You kill somebody, you die.

And you're like, those aren't even in the same plane. Or are they? And for the sake of time, I won't go into too much into this.

And there it follows the lex talionis code. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. It's just a guide, a fair, this is what is fair. And this should guide, determining what is just.

[26 : 55] The punishment should fit the crime. The restitution should be fitting to the offense. No punishment should be excessive. A petty crime should not cost someone's life. That's really why it's laid out there. The punishment must be proportional to the crime.

But the shocking matter in these verses is that murder and the misuse of God's name are brought to the same level.

How holy is the name? Well, you blaspheme the name. It's equivalent to killing somebody. How could these be the same?

How could the loss of life be the same as speaking loosely of God? And as I sat in this text, and I'll wind down with this. I couldn't help but come away with this thought.

See, a holy God must be associated with life and love. He's a life giver.

[28 : 05] He bestows love. He is a life giving God. He is the light of the world. He is the bread of life. Since he is both life and love, to take his name and to use it as a curse or condemnation on

others is the antithesis of who he is.

You dishonor the name when you use his name as a weapon to bring down, to wish death, or cut down another.

It doesn't make sense. It does not make sense. And if you're a basketball fan, I just saw this clip this last week on national television.

It's the playoffs, so everything gets heightened a little bit. And what I witnessed was this NBA head coach, and I'll leave him unnamed because I don't like the team anyways, I'll leave him unnamed, and he calls a timeout, burst on the floor, and in his anger, he's like, Christ angry at the incompetence of his players and what did he do the name that imparts life the name that gives love he wielded it and brought death that's blasphemy that's horrific the name of the Lord you pronounce you take God's name and pronounce death on a person you take God's name and you bring down another person it is equivalent to killing someone who bears his image if you treat the name of God or the image of God with contempt it will cost your very life that's what Israel learned if you blaspheme the name of God or murder a person that bears the image of God it is the most serious of offenses for the people of God they would be identified by how they honored the name and so here as the nation was taking shape as they were experiencing the presence of God daily it had to affect or transform their conduct who you spend your time with is who you become and for Israel if they were with the Lord every day it would honor and revere his holy name what sort of name is this it's a mighty name and what sort of name is this it's an everlasting name for unto us a child of is born a son is given he will be called wonderful counsel mighty God everlasting father what sort of name is this it is a royal name where is he who was born the king of the Jews what sort of name was this it is a saving name and you shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins what kind of name is this it is a healing name silver or gold I don't have but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise and walk what kind of name is this it is an awesome name even demons are subject to us in your name it is an exclusive name there is no other name under heaven given unto men whereby you can be saved it is an exalted name therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above all names that at his name every knee will bow and it is a name that according to the writer of revelation rests upon God's people because when it's all said and done they will see his face and his name will be on their forehead and maybe not tattooed but certainly on our minds that's the name and so honor the name honor the name oh father we are a people who want to be conformed into the image of your beloved son that as we spend time with you we recognize we become like you and our conduct is transformed our will is changed our loves are redirected our energies are reinvigorated and so may we be a people that in spending experiencing the presence of the Lord that we would be those who esteem your name help us to that end we pray may we see you as holy holy holy we ask these things for your name's sake amen voy