

Leviticus 17

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Date: 16 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Father, as we turn now to your word, we ask for your help. That we believe that as the rain and the snow that is falling outside right now come from heaven, they do not return without watering the earth.

So your word goes out from your mouth and it never returns to you empty, but accomplishes all that which you purpose. And so, Father, we pray that the words that proceed from my mouth may be true words, words that come from you.

Strengthen us to listen and hear, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. March 15th, 1937.

Dave was around. All right. Nearly 88 years to this day.

It was here in Chicago, actually, that under the leadership of a physician, Dr. Bernard Fontes, a physician at Cook County Hospital, that under his leadership and direction, the doors to the world's first blood bank opened.

[1 : 30] As patients, as he observed, as patients in the city died in search of matching donors, Dr. Fontes created a means whereby he could collect blood, store it for a short period of time, in order to link up with patients and offer blood transfusions to save their lives.

Taking the language from banking, individuals could deposit blood, and others in need could make withdrawals. In the United States alone, nearly 13.6 million units of blood are collected annually.

30,000 units distributed daily. One in seven patients that get admitted into a hospital require blood.

A blood transfusion happens every two seconds. Routinely, you might hear the American Red Cross summon citizens to donate blood, for in so doing, you literally preserve one's life.

Life requires blood. Your life. My life. Our lives require ample blood to flow through our veins to provide what is necessary.

[3 : 04] It is essential, so much so, that the writer of Leviticus equates the two, for the life of the creature is its blood.

Verse 14. Its blood is its life. And with that, I've tagged our time this morning. There is life in the blood.

There is life in the blood. The 17th chapter of Leviticus begins a transition in the book. We've worked our way through 16 chapters up to this point, and the first half has largely been concerned about how a people approach God.

How could they set apart a sacred sanctuary where a holy God would take up residency? We discovered that there were expectations and requirements upon the people.

God would not be approached whimsically, casually, flippantly. No, his people rather would have to gather in distinction, accompanied by sacrifice, led by an exclusive priesthood and holy reverence.

[4 : 20] And now, as the second half of Leviticus begins, the question the writer, I believe, is trying to answer is, what type of people are they to be?

If the first half of the book was laid out, that holiness would be the center, the gathering point for the nation, the second half of the book is, what type of people are they to be?

What should they be like in their homes, among their neighbors, in the public square, in the wilderness, or outside the camp, in the open field?

You see, at this point, you have to recall, Israel was an emerging nation. They were nomadic. They didn't have any permanent residencies in any place, but they were traveling from point to point.

What type of people were they to be among the nations as they traveled? And now, in chapter 17, for the first time in the book, we see the Lord speaking to Moses and summoning not only Aaron and his sons, the priesthood, but actually summoning the entire community of people.

[5 : 39] So for the first time in the book, God commands Moses, gather everybody together, not just the set-apart priests, not just the lay people. Bring them all together, because the instruction would now come from God to all the people.

It's not just for the clergy. It's not just for the people. It's for the nation as a whole. And here, we find what God's desire is for all the people.

For the first time in Leviticus, God gathers all the people under Moses together. And while there are two groups, surely they have different roles to play, the priests and the people.

What they are to discover is neither is exempt from living a holy life in the presence of God. Whether you are elected to office, or not elected, or whether you received, inherited office as a descendant of Aaron, or whether you are a normal person amongst the nation, you were to live lives that were holy in the presence of God.

And now out of chapter 17, what we'll find is Israel's ethical code. How were they to live out being God's people from the least to the greatest?

[7 : 04] Holiness would be expected of them. Not only when approaching God, but in subsequent weeks, we'll see that holiness is expected when approaching one another.

I'll frame our time together in two blocks this morning. The first block is simply found in verses three to nine. I put it under the heading, no other gods. No other gods.

The second block runs from verses 10 to 16. I put it under the heading, there's no other way. There's no other way. Israel would be a people that directed their worship to no other gods.

Israel would be a people that would be saved solely by blood. There was no other way. No other gods, no other way.

New prohibitions arise, begin to arise in chapter, in verse three. We'll just read it together. If anyone of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp or kills it outside the camp and then does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord, blood guilt shall be imputed to that man.

[8 : 27] He has shed blood. And that man shall be cut off from amongst the people. Here, from the outset, God notes a prohibition.

When the time comes, he's saying to his people, and you are outside the vicinity of the camp, perhaps in an open field, and you happen to slaughter an animal or you desire to slaughter an animal, you must bring it to the center of the tent of meeting and offer it there.

You might think it's, well, God, I'm just gonna offer it here. It's quite inconvenient to drag this from here to there. It's going to be tedious.

It's gonna be troublesome. But the stipulation from God is, no, the location of the sacrifice would remain the same. You aren't permitted to set up an altar in the field.

You're not permitted to neglect the portion that you're to bring to the priests or share with the people. Most importantly, you do this, why? So you won't succumb to the temptation to offer the sacrifice to foreign gods.

[9 : 46] There's the reason in verse seven. The Bible anticipates there will be a tendency for the people of God to drift from devotion to God.

You can imagine as life unfolds and you live out being a nation, there's gonna be great temptation. There will be a draw. There will be these pulls. There will be these lures that pull you away from exclusive worship and sole allegiance to God.

You may recall that it didn't take long at all that after the nation is delivered from Pharaoh, they plummet themselves into idolatry.

Aaron himself leads the worship service. A golden calf is fashioned while Moses met with God on the mountaintop. You see, the scene is going to repeat itself.

The heart of God's people would be easily enticed. particularly as they engaged in worship. You see, what is demanded here is that the people were to see the worship of God as a sacred act.

[10 : 58] It's not a casual act. It's not a mindless act. It's not as if God were bloodthirsty or merely looking for the endless slaying of animals.

No. What he is doing for his people is reminding them that his worship required exclusive devotion.

If the people failed, they would be guilty of blood guilt, the act of needless violence and death, and they would be cut off from the people. The term to be cut off carries probably multiple meanings.

It could be socially outcasted. It could be incurring condemnation on future progeny. It could be even death. Regardless, it draws God's displeasure. Israel was not permitted to be a people that simply just shed blood and slaughtered animals for no reason.

The taking of life would be a serious matter. Therefore, in the field, when they chose to slaughter an animal, it wasn't to be a mindless act. It was to be an act of worship.

[12 : 08] See, the worship of God is no trivial matter. It would be intentional, exercised with forethought, and carried out in God's way. The phrase that occurs probably most in these verses, verses 3 to 9, is actually this phrase, to the Lord.

to the Lord. At least five times in our English Bibles. Because as the people bring their offerings to the Lord, it is contrasted with offering it to someone else.

They're not allowed, they, when they bring a sacrifice to the Lord, they're not allowed to do whatever they want. They're not permitted to this do-it-yourself spirituality.

They weren't permitted to set up their own forms of sacrifice, offer whatever they wanted, whenever, whenever, whenever they wanted, wherever they felt like it, and how they liked.

We already saw last week that there was a day for it. They came at a certain time. There's a certain place for it. The entrance of the tent of meeting, how it's done.

[13 : 21] It's methodically recorded in the previous chapters. the people could not come and worship on their own terms, for their ease, or whatever their desired preference was.

If they did so, the result would be inevitable. They would invite foreign practices into their worship service, unacceptable ideas. They would commit idolatry. And the language is so harsh, even vivid and confrontational.

They would be guilty of spiritual prostitution. You see that in verse 7. They would turn, they would be guilty of turning their back on God and selling themselves to gods who are no gods at all.

See, these commands in verses 3 to 9 really concern the sacrifices at the sanctuary. the Bible is saying to the people, they do, these sacrifices occur nowhere else and to no one else.

They occur here at the tent of meeting and they occur only to the Lord. Nowhere else and no one else. The people were to worship nowhere else in order to remind them that there was no one else who should receive their worship.

[14 : 39] for God's people there are no other gods. No other gods. It is to fortify the first two commandments that you might be familiar with.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image in any likeness or anything in heaven above or on earth or that is even in earth beneath or the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God. They were to devote themselves exclusively to God.

And the warning comes to us today as well. The human heart is not that different from the people of Israel. Certainly the form of worship has changed.

We're not slaying animals casually or wantonly in the open fields but perhaps we've created our own ideas of how to worship God. Perhaps we've justified ourselves.

[15 : 45] I can offer a sacrifice to goat demons and offering sacrifices to God simultaneously. I'll import, I'll hedge, hedge my bets to cover my bases.

I'll import some of this eastern mysticism that I read about. I'm going to practice this belief of self-manifestation out of me, this God-like person and incorporate Christian practices as well.

And soon you find that you've created an array of gods, a pantheon of gods. whether it's a god in the east, a god here, or god of the pages of the scriptures, you soon find that you're worshipping not the god of the Bible at all.

And this is the powerful lure that Leviticus 17 anticipates, that our hearts are so easily drawn to things we want to worship.

we see the world value something around us and it tugs at us as well, doesn't it? Money. If I just had more of it.

[17 : 01] If I just earned, got a hold, banked more of it. If I stored more of it. The love of money. If I just get enough and store it up, I'll defer generosity to later.

Maybe it's success. An achievement. How can I strengthen my resume? Comfort. What will it take to obtain the most comfortable life as possible?

And here we have ourselves sacrificing to these gods of money, comfort, achievement, all the while neglecting the worship of the one true God.

You see, the world has all these gods calling for our sacrifices. Where do you want to spend your time? Oh, I could just do these 90 hours a week. I can.

I must. And on the altar of that, you're sacrificing. See, Leviticus forewarns us that we are all enticed in various ways.

[18 : 12] And the call is for us to go nowhere else and to no one else but God alone. The people of God have no other gods.

God is the sole recipient of our sacrifices. Secondly, there's no other way. It's going to take me a little bit to explain this one because the words aren't in the text, but I think I'll get there.

Israel would be a people that would be saved through blood. There was no other way. There was no other way. Verses 10 to 16 provide really three additional prohibitions and they're all concerning not where one can sacrifice but what one can eat.

Verse 10 gives us the prohibition. If anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.

In verses 10 to 16 you have really the densest portion in all of scriptures with the mention of blood. If you're a young listener and you have your Bible open before you, you should count how many times the word blood occurs in verses 10 to 16.

[19:37] I'm unsure whether you're like me or not in this way when it comes to blood. My children entered the world all via C-section. I cannot recall which child it was, probably the first one, but I was reminded very vividly, shockingly, that I don't like blood.

I don't like blood at all. I remember I'm sitting in the waiting room and I'm scrubbed out and have a hairnet and booties around my shoes and scrubs and a mask and there the nurse rushes in and says okay we're ready for you and I'm like oh okay this is going to be great this is going to be great and she walks me into the room says this is the operating room you just go and have a seat over there and so she opens the door I walk in and there Christy is on the table and there's a bright light shining down on her and I look at that and I go I don't want to go in there that is too bloody gruesome there's so many things that shouldn't be visible and what I did I turned and I literally just kind of scurried around the edge of the room and didn't make any eye contact until you get to the other side and thankfully they have this drape that separates her upper and lower body and

I'm incredibly thankful for that partition that's put up to hide the view but there is something both horrific there's something horrific about watching blood pour forth from a living creature it's horribly unnatural nauseating to some watching blood pour forth uncontrollably from a living body if you or I were to see a pool of blood or puddle of blood anywhere I believe there's a natural instinct to panic instinctive natural instinct to panic or be revulsed why because when we see blood we know that it comes from something living for it to be visible something awful must have happened blood is designed to remain inside the body it is in our passage described that which is required to sustain life no blood implies no life for the life is in the blood and when there is loss of blood you and

I know very well if it's unstopped there will be loss of life and here the significance of blood is tied to the significance of life because it is the source of life God commands his people to refrain from ingesting it it implies two things the first is this do not drink it do not drink it that was under cooked which carried blood remains and maybe you might have Jewish friends today and when they eat kosher there's certainly things they aren't supposed to eat they're not supposed to drink or eat meat and milk simultaneously to maintain kosher but one of the things requirements of kosher actually pertains to blood they're not permitted to eat meat that has not been treated in such a way as to extract or adequately drain the blood from the meat see

Israel was to treat blood as sacred because life was sacred if you were if you are hunting they were to revere the life of the beast or the bird by pouring the blood onto the earth verse 13 if you come across a carcass you are unclean until evening after you bathed to honor life here is the significance of life whether it be the blood of a man or blood of a beast it would not be treated with contempt by ingesting it or thinking that life was the losing of life or the outflowing of blood was normal they were to wash bathe and wait to be reminded that the death of even an animal was unnatural see the clear inference here is that the loss of blood equates with the loss of life and God's people the community seeking God's holiness should never be unconcerned about the loss of life blood is therefore for

[24 : 38] Israel the emblem of life but it would go beyond just physical life the significance of blood for the people of God would find its full meaning in verse 11 you ought to star it highlight it underline it for the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life all of a sudden the writer transposes it's a musical term I know I think from speaking about physical life to all of a sudden a spiritual life an atonement for our souls blood would bring not only physical life but it would bring atonement for the souls of the people and what is perceived as a physical reality is now escalated to a spiritual reality atonement is a big word it simply means this making people right before

God appeasing the wrath of a holy God rightly directed against evil and human rebellion here God designates that the blood of animals has been set apart to make atonement for the sins of the people in other words early on in the Bible what God is saying is there is something else's blood that can actually be substituted for your soul the picture is transactional the blood of another can impart life to you it's not an unfamiliar concept in the Bible if you're a student in the Bible you see it immediately after Adam and Eve rebel in the garden of Eden in their nakedness and shame they hide themselves they sew together fig leaves to make loin cloths but God upgrades their garments levels them up we find that God would fashion new garments for them made out of animal skin to hide their nakedness and cover their shame but it would come at the expense of a death of an animal and this principle would continue

Pharaoh would not let God's people go his hard heart would not free be enslaved so he brings about a series of plagues and it culminates in the tenth one where God would strike down the firstborn in all of Egypt in order to be spared God instructs the people of Israel to take a lamb slaughter it take its blood put it on the lintel and the two doorposts and that night when the Lord passes through when he sees the blood the Lord would pass over and not strike anyone in the home particularly the firstborn the blood of the lamb would result in the life of the people the death of the lamb would result in life for the people the lamb would be the substitute for your firstborn one its death will result in your life and

Leviticus now reinforces reality the sin and the guilt offerings we looked at in earlier stories chapter 16 and now in 17 the blood of another would be a means of life for you one in your place one in your stead one as a substitute see our atonement our forgiveness our reconciliation to God our redemption our salvation would come no other way it would require blood for it is emblematic of life the blood or the life of this one for your life it is the most costly of substances your atonement cannot be acquired or bought all the financial portfolios in the world will not atone for your sin your atonement cannot be earned or achieved through good works radical generosity or even selfless service your atonement cannot be inherited as if it were a trait or an heirloom no the salvation of your soul your atonement requires blood there's no other way and perhaps you've come entirely unaware this morning being

I've brought no lamb I have no goat I have no ram I have no sheep I have no such provision well and you're asking if there's no other way then what chance do I have to stand right before God well there is no other way but God made a way and this morning I need to point you to the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world his name is Jesus Jesus and as God would have it he himself God himself would be the substitute he himself would accomplish atonement and the new testament is replete with verses he himself in his final meal Jesus his last meal takes the cup after supper and what does he declare this cup this cup this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin

[31 : 08] Paul would tell us that we are justified by his blood in him we have the redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses he would make peace by his blood shed on the cross Jesus suffered outside the city to sanctify the people with his own blood without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins it's the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin he has freed us from our sins by his blood and here you have a substitute a lamb that bleeds for you you see heaven has a blood bank it never runs out it is not like the

American red cross two years ago had to make a public announcement summoning more donors because there is a need this heaven's blood bank never runs low it doesn't need masses of donors it has one single donor there is always a sufficient supply there is always ample inventory it is forever effective it never diminishes in its power it does not dim in its potency it never gets diluted it's forever effective and I know there's some that walk in this morning and your guilt is too much to bear your sins are exceedingly great your shame may be overwhelming to consider and your darkness and despair may bring you to your very death then it is this day then it this day this very day you must take hold of

Christ by faith then you will understand what it truly means to find life by his blood your life is found in his blood and whether you be in the lowest of valleys which will sink or if you be in the highest of mountains where an oxygen tank is required the blood will find you the blood could save you it will never lose its power and I offer it this morning 2,000 years after it flowed from that cross to you because it can save you and heal you and restore you because there is no other way God God

Father oh we are a people with no other God I know a people who can be saved in no other way that there is no other name given to humanity that can save with the name of Jesus and Father there are many in this room young old near far in despair or rejoicing that would your blood find them would you speak a word that you are here to save them and you have substituted yourself that no goat is needed no lamb is necessary for the son himself is our lamb save we pray we ask these things for

Jesus sake amen