

# Set apart for service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Folks, I'm sorry that over the past weeks and months we've ended up with quite a bitty series so far in our journey through Leviticus. So I thought before we turn to chapter 8 tonight that I'd kind of remind you a little bit of where we've been. So we began our series in Leviticus with the premise that the book is giving us a solution to the problem that's presented in the closing verses of the book of Exodus. Remember at the end of Exodus the tabernacle and all of the courtyard and everything has been built and the glory of God descends and Moses could not enter the tent of meeting. Moses could not go and meet with God because that tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord, the holiness of God too great for anyone to simply approach. And in what we've looked at in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, we've seen how God provided the sacrificial system. He set down those means by which his people might safely dwell in his presence, how they might have fellowship with a holy God. Most recently we were reflecting a bit on just how serious the sin problem is and on the grace of God providing a way forwards for those who failed, for those who keep falling short time and time again. And with this sacrificial system laid down, they then need somebody to administer this system. There's a need for people set apart for God's service. God's people need priests. And there we turn as we come to chapters 8 and 9. So grab your

Bibles and Jim is going to come and read for us. So our reading this evening is from Leviticus chapter 8 and we're reading chapter 8 and chapter 9.

Leviticus chapter 8. The Lord said to Moses, bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams in the basket containing bread made without yeast, and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Moses did as the Lord commanded him and the assembly gathered at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Moses said to the assembly, this is what the Lord has commanded to be done. Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water.

He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him. He also fastened the ephod with a decorative waistband which he tied around him. He placed the breast plate on him and put the urim and thumim in the breast piece. Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, sacred emblem, on the front of it as the Lord commanded Moses.

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it and so consecrated them. He sprinkled some of the oil in the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. Then he brought Aaron's sons forward, put tunics on them, tied sashes around them and fashioned caps on them as the Lord commanded Moses. He then presented the bull for the sin offering and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of the blood and with his fingers he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar so he consecrated it to make atonement for it.

[ 4 : 14 ] Moses also took all the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver and both kidneys and their fat and burned it on the altar. But the bull with its hide and its flesh and its intestines he burned up outside the camp as the Lord commanded Moses. He then presented the ram for the burnt offering and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. Then Moses slaughtered the ram and splashed the blood against the sides of the altar. He cut the ram into pieces and burned the head, the pieces and the fat. He washed the internal organs and the legs with water and burned the whole ram on the altar.

It was a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, a food offering presented to the Lord as the Lord commanded Moses. He then presented the other ram, the ram for the ordination and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. Moses slaughtered the ram and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Moses also brought Aaron's sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he splashed blood against the sides of the altar.

After that he took the fat, the fat tail, all the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, both kidneys and their fat and the right thigh. And from the basket of bread made without yeast, which was before the Lord, he took one thick loaf, one thick loaf with olive oil mixed in and one thin loaf. And he put these on the fat portions and on the right thigh. He put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and they waved them before the Lord as a wave offering. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering as an ordination offering.

A pleasing aroma, a food offering presented to the Lord. Moses also took the breast, which was his share of the ordination ram, and waved it before the Lord as a wave offering, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood from the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments and his sons and his sons and their garments. Moses then said to Aaron and his sons, cook the meat at the entrance to the tent of meeting and eat it there with the bread from the basket of ordination offerings, as I was commanded. Aaron and his sons are to eat it.

[ 7 : 18 ] Then burn up the rest of the meat and the bread. Do not leave the entrance to the tent of meeting for seven days until the days for your ordination are completed, for your ordination will last seven days.

What has been done today was commanded by the Lord to make atonement for you. You must stay at the entrance to the tent of meeting day and night for seven days and do what the Lord requires, so you will not die, for that is what I have been commanded. So Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord commanded through Moses. On the eighth day, Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. He said to Aaron, take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the Lord. Then say to the Israelites, take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb, both a year old and without defect, for a burnt offering, and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the Lord, together with a grain offering mixed with olive oil. For today the Lord will appear to you. They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the

Lord. Then Moses said, this is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you. Moses said to Aaron, come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people. Sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them as the Lord has commanded. So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself. His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar. The rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. On the altar he burned the fat, the kidneys, and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering as the Lord commanded Moses. The flesh and the hide he burned up outside the camp.

Then he slaughtered the blood offering. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. They handed him the burnt offering piece by piece, including the head, and he burned them on the altar. He washed the internal organs and the legs and burnt them on top of the burnt offering on the altar. Aaron then brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat for the people's sin offering and slaughtered it, and offered it for a sin offering as he did with the first one. He brought the burnt offering and offered it in the prescribed way. He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. But the fat portions of the ox and the ram, the fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys, and the long lobe of the liver, the fat. These they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the altar. Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as a wave offering, as Moses commanded. Then Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering, he stepped down. Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting.

[ 11 : 28 ] When they came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down. Amen.

Do you want to serve God? Do you want to be useful to him? Do you want to live your life focused on his requirements? I hope that you do. I hope that that is your intention, your objective in how you spend your days. That is the question before us this evening. What does it look like to live a life of service to God? And as we learn here in these verses about what was expected of the priests in those Old Testament days, it is helpful, hopefully, to bear in mind two interpretive principles.

Firstly, in accordance with the clear teaching of the book of Hebrews, we remember that Christ himself is our great high priest, that he is our only mediator, that he is the perfect exemplar towards which the Old Testament priesthood was only pointing. Christ is our great high priest.

Second interpretive principle, though, is that we ourselves are called to priesthood. Maybe you don't naturally think of yourself as a priest, but this is true of all of God's people, that we are called to be priests. We thought about this a few months back, didn't we? Peter writes in chapter two of his letter, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Clearly there, Peter is kind of broadening out what it is to be a priest beyond their previous understanding. He encompasses more under the banner of priesthood than God's people would have previously expected. But crucially, the foundation that he's building on as he writes that letter, the foundation he's building on is the understanding that comes from the background of passages like this one in

Leviticus. This is what it is to be a priest. When Peter tells the people to whom he writes his letter that they are priests, this is what's in their heads. This is what priests do. This is what priests are expected to be like. So if you are even slightly tempted to see these chapters as being of distant or limited relevance, well, remember these interpretive principles, that this is pointing us to Jesus, our great high priest, and that we are called to priesthood ourselves, and that therefore service of God, a life dedicated to his purposes, is going to look in some ways at least a bit like what we're looking at here in Leviticus. With that in mind, my intention is to draw three points from these verses, and this evening those points are in the form of commands for you and for me. Number one, take your role seriously. Take it seriously, this task to which we are called as priests of the Most High

[ 15 : 12 ] God. Number two, put on your own mask first. All will become clear. Number three, serve the people around you. Take your role seriously. Put on your own mask first. Serve the people around you. I hope that this account of the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests in Israel will encourage us to take these commands seriously, to serve the people around us. So take your role seriously. Did you notice, have you noticed over the past weeks of looking at the book of Leviticus, have you noticed just how much these priests are expected to do day in and day out? Did you notice in these verses that we've just read, just how many different things have to be done to prepare them to be fit for the role to which they have just been appointed? Remember these first seven chapters of the book, they laid out all of the methodology for the five different kinds of sacrifice. The whole burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering. All of these different sacrifices that these priests must be equipped to offer. Lots of different sacrifices to be made at different times and for different reasons. At the minimum, a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening, each with their accompanying grain, and then whatever's required for the particular festivals, and then whatever people choose to bring on a particular day as offerings for fellowship or offerings for sin.

These priests would have been pretty busy. Because remember, none of the sacrifices expected of God's people, none of them can happen without the priests involved. The only legitimate pattern of sacrifice from the books of Exodus and Leviticus onwards, the only legitimate pattern of sacrifice is to be done in the courts of the tabernacle complex with the supervision and assistance of a priest.

Yes, the individual Israelite, the person bringing the offering, he's there in the thick of it. He has to kill the animal himself. But the priests are always there. It isn't a sacrifice according to God's pattern if the priest is not there. All day, day in and day out. So it seems to me that if you and I are called to be priests, then that is probably not a calling to a life of endless relaxation, is it? But even more directly in the chapters before us today, there's a big clue to the significance of the role in all of these preparations for it. So first, in these couple of chapters, first, all the people and equipment are gathered, verses 2 through 4. This isn't a small-scale thing done in private. This isn't, you know, Moses and Aaron tucked away in a corner somewhere, you know, with one or two witnesses. No, the whole of God's people are gathered to see what happens. Gathered because these are the priests who are going to serve them week after week after year after year, dedicated to their service. So they gather all of the different resources. Then verse 6, these people are washed. Verses 7 through 9, they're dressed in these impressive garments, garments far more ornate than anything that an ordinary person would be wearing.

You've got the kind of general impressiveness of the garments, and then you've got the urim and the thummim that are used for determining the will of God. You've got that turban with the golden plate that declares the high priest to be holy to the Lord, as commanded back in Exodus 28. In fact, all of this in these chapters, this is them actually doing what God had laid out for them way back at the same time as the instructions for building the tabernacle. He told them then how they were going to ordain priests, and now he says it's time to actually go and do it. So they're dressed in these garments. Verses 10 and following, the tabernacle where the priests will work, and they themselves as the priests are anointed with oil. And then after that, the sacrifices begin. A bull, and a ram, and another ram, and then some more oil. And that oil accompanied with the blood of the sacrifices, the priests are sprinkled with that blood along with their garments, everything covered in this mixture of blood and oil. And all of that is day one. Verse 33 then says they've got seven more days of this to do. Seven days spent at the gate, the doorway of the tabernacle. Too holy to be out in the rest of the camp, not yet holy enough to be inside. Seven days in the doorway, in that process of preparation. And commentators are agreed that at least some of these sacrifices, probably all three of them, are being repeated on each of those seven days. The bull, and the ram, and the ram. Seven days are the entrance to the tent of meeting. Night and day, lest, verse 35, lest they die. It is not a small thing that these priests are called to do.

This is a serious calling for them, that will take over their whole lives. So too, you and I, called to be a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. That is a thing to take seriously. That is a role that requires our whole lives, that takes over every minute of every day, that encompasses all of our behavior, that has expectations for how we will live each and every day, for how we will spend our time. It is a serious thing.

[ 21 : 04 ] Serious second. Second, put on your own mask first. As we come into the first half of chapter 9, here we find what is, to my mind, the most interesting feature of this ordination narrative across these two chapters. So with that heading in mind, put on your own mask first, listen again to what Aaron and those around him are to do in this section.

Leviticus chapter 9, verse 1. They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. And Moses said, this is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you. Moses said to Aaron, come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and the people.

Sacrifice the offering that is for the people, and make atonement for them as the Lord has commanded. So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself.

His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar. The rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. On the altar, he burned the fat, the kidneys, and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering, as the Lord commanded Moses.

The flesh and the hide he burned outside the camp. Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. They handed him the burnt offering, piece by piece, including the hair, and he burned them on the altar. He washed the internal organs and the legs, and burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar. So they've had this seven-day process of their ordination. Seven days spent at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Seven days in the tabernacle gateway. Significant number of sacrifices being offered during that time. And I suppose, I suppose after that, that given the centrality of sacrifice to the role of a priest, given that that's what the priest is there for, to bring sacrifices, I suppose it's no surprise that the first thing Aaron is called to do as a newly ordained high priest is make a sacrifice. This much is unsurprising. But even with all of that that's gone before, these seven days of sacrifices being offered as part of the preparation of Aaron and his sons ready to be priests, all this blood shed, the first sacrifice that Aaron must make is on his own behalf.

[ 24 : 12 ] Aaron isn't fit to bring a sacrifice on behalf of the people as he then does from verse 15 onwards. He's not fit to do that until he's brought his own sin offering and his own burnt offering.

It is vital that Aaron and his sons know, and I mean know experientially, know in their bones, know not just in theory, to know that they are sinners. They need to know that they are not inherently better than the people they're going to serve. Neither they nor the people they serve will be well served by them thinking otherwise. Folks, down through history, from the days of Aaron and his sons up to the present day, and doubtless going forwards, down through history, significant damage has been done in situations where people forget this principle, where people forget their spiritual leaders are themselves sinners. Ministers do themselves great damage by acting as if they are somehow above. Congregations do great damage to themselves and to their ministers by putting them onto a pedestal. It helps no one. These priests have to model that they are sinners in need of God's grace, sinners in need of God's grace as much as anyone else. These priests must model that, and so too must anyone who would take on any kind of a similar role today.

One of the principles in the Church of England is that when you come to the Lord's Table, when you come to share communion, in the Church of England, the priest, as they often call them, the minister, always takes the elements first. And some people look at that and think that that is a sort of arrogance, that the priest is served before the people. Well, at least as it was originally set up, it was no such thing. It was this principle, that the vicar cannot dare to serve anyone else before he himself is washed clean. Now, whether or not that's recognized and whether that should be universal is a whole other question, but that is the sort of thing that is at work, that recognition, this matters. God's people, all of us, we are sinners in need of grace, and that is true of each and every one of us. So that's a principle that will affect how those who have this sort of spiritual leadership role will behave. But it's also a principle for all of us, isn't it? Because we're all a nation of priests. Think for a moment about the public perception of what Christians are like.

I think there are plenty of people who think Christians are the people who've got everything sorted. Christians are the good people. Christians are the people who think they're better than anyone else. Christians are the people who look down on others as lesser. Well, Aaron had to remind the Israelites. Aaron had to remind himself that he is not better, that he's a man in need of grace, that he must offer sacrifices on his own behalf. Well, so too you and I. If people are tempted to look at us and think that we think we're better, well, we need to show them in our words and our actions that that is not the reality, that we are sinners in need of grace. Aaron had to offer sacrifices on his own behalf, and it had to happen first. It is foolish to attempt to fit someone else's oxygen mask on the plane until you've attended to your own. You risk both perishing. It is foolish for us to think that we might be fit to serve others as a priest until our own sins are attended to, because we risk both perishing.

So too, if we seek to act as priests for the good of others without due preparation of ourselves, we can't spend our time worrying about the sins of other people whilst wallowing in our own wrongdoing.

[ 29 : 03 ] Now, you may very well say to me, Benj, our sins are dealt with. You're absolutely right, they are. Don't lose sight of that for one moment. The sacrifice for our sins has been made. Christ died once for all.

Nothing can take away from that. That is absolutely true. So let's remember how wonderful it is that we have a great high priest who was himself completely without sin and who therefore had no need to sacrifice on his own behalf before entering into the heavenly places carrying his blood on our behalf.

Christ is an infinitely better, infinitely better high priest than Aaron was and an infinitely better priest than any of us could ever be. Therefore, if you are in Christ, if you have come to him in repentance and faith, if you have confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will indeed be saved. Romans 10.

This is absolutely unequivocally true. Don't doubt it for a moment. There is no need for further sacrifice to cleanse you from your sin. But it is also true that in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus said, Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching people what discipleship looks like. He's speaking to people whose sins are washed away and saying there's a whacking great plank in your eye. It's dangerous for you to act as though there isn't.

Do you remember all those weeks ago when we considered the sin offering in the preceding chapters? We reflected a little bit about the corrosive power of sin, about just how big an impact it has in our lives and on the situations around us. Yes, the most fundamental dimension of sin is that sin separates us from God. But even when that separation is dealt with, even when that is atoned for by the blood of Jesus, even when that relationship is restored, even when we have been forgiven, that clearly doesn't mean that all impact of sin is instantly removed. Just think about David and his sin. The child still died, folks. David was forgiven and the child still died. Sin has a corrosive effect. And therefore, I think if there's a principle here, it's that we need to think about our sin having been comprehensively addressed before we presume to put on someone else's oxygen mask. That as I said earlier, if we're kind of wallowing in the sin, if the sin's corrosive effects are still there tainting our response, if we're still being affected by that, if we're unable to see things objectively, if we're...that we can't serve others where our sin is still having that corrosive impact. And yet, yet my third charge this evening is serve the people around you.

[ 32 : 33 ] And you might well think, how could we ever do that, given the foregoing? Because we don't get free from the impact of our sin. I have plenty of times when I think, how could I ever serve someone? I know what I'm like. How can we presume to serve someone else?

But that is the whole point of being a priest. That's the purpose, to serve others.

Aaron and his sons, they're not appointed as priests for God's benefit, are they? God doesn't need to be fed. God doesn't have some kind of egotistical neediness where he's all at sea unless people are worshipping him and he needs to appoint priests so that that'll happen. God doesn't need it.

Now, the point of Aaron, the point of the whole priesthood, the point of all of these regulations, the point of Christ as our great high priest, the point of ourselves as a kingdom of priests, the point is to serve other people.

Priests act on behalf of the people representing them before God. Priests assist in the process of bringing an acceptable sacrifice. So having offered the sacrifices required on his own behalf, Aaron then proceeds immediately in verse 15 to bring a sin offering for the people and then a burnt offering and a grain offering and he slaughters an ox and a ram as a fellowship offering.

[ 34 : 16 ] That's the whole point. Those eight days of preparation and the years of preparation before as he walked through the wilderness beside Moses, as he heard God speaking, all of his preparations are equipping him for exactly this, to serve God's people.

Aaron offers the sacrifices and then, verse 22, he lifts his hands towards the people and he blesses them. And God demonstrates his pleasure, his pleasure with who they are and with what they've done.

See that crisis, that crisis from the end of the book of Exodus is finally over. Verse 23, Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting.

They now come into God's presence. And in due course, they come back out. They bless the people again and God's glory appears. In verse 24, the fire comes out and consumes the offerings.

These offerings have been kind of quietly smoldering away on the altar. And the fire comes down from heaven or out from the tent and consumes them in an instant. Just like in that latter confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal that you're probably more familiar with.

[ 35 : 33 ] God demonstrates by fire that he is God, that he is sovereign, that he is in control. And he demonstrates that these sacrifices on that altar right then, and therefore all of the foregoing process, that this is acceptable in his sight.

Aaron and his sons are now fit to serve and that's the whole point. The system's in place. They know what sacrifices are to be offered and how. And God's people now have people licensed to offer these sacrifices.

The way to God now stands open. The way through sacrifice and the priesthood. The way stands open for God's people to have fellowship with a holy God.

Therefore, for you and I, called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That holiness, that priestliness, that cannot possibly mean separation.

It cannot mean being aloof, trying to keep ourselves perfectly pure. For us to be a kingdom of priests cannot possibly mean that we're meant to act like the priest and the Pharisee in the parable of the Good Samaritan, walking by on the other side for fear of contamination.

[ 36 : 54 ] The parable condemns that behavior. That isn't how priests are supposed to behave. They're supposed to be there, helping people. The whole point of having priests is to serve others, to point people to God, to help others to draw into his presence, to present Christ to those who do not know him, to teach those who are ignorant of God's word, to teach them what he expects of the people he's created.

There is a profound significance to the role to which we are called. We dare not seek to help others until we have fitted our own masks.

But we also, we must not keep fiddling with the straps of our own mask whilst others perish. We are called to serve the people around us.

Let's pray. Lord God, help us to recognize what you have called us to, the service that you have in mind for us.

Equip us for that with all that we need. Cleanse our hearts. Cleanse us from the corrosive effects of our sinfulness. Cleanse us in order that we might be a blessing to those around us.

[ 38 : 22 ] That we might truly be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, fit for your service. Amen.