

PM Leviticus 9:1-24 & Luke 24:36-53

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Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0 : 00] It's on page 105 of the Church Bible. So Leviticus chapter 9. This is set at Mount Sinai.

God has brought the Israelites out of Egypt, out of their slavery, and brought them to Mount Sinai, where God gives them the covenant and the law and instructions on how to worship him, which forms much of Leviticus.

So we're going to read from the beginning of Leviticus chapter 9. On the eighth day, Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel.

And he said to Aaron, And they brought what Moses commanded in front of the tent of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord. And Moses said, This is the thing that the Lord commanded you to do, that the glory of the Lord may appear to you.

[1 : 43] Then Moses said to Aaron, Draw near to the altar, and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people.

And bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them as the Lord has commanded. So Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself.

And the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar, and poured out the blood at the base of the altar.

But the fat and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering, he burned on the altar, as the Lord commanded Moses.

The flesh and the skin he burned up with fire outside the camp. Then he killed the burnt offering, and Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar.

[2 : 46] And they handed the burnt offering to him, piece by piece, and the head, and he burned them on the altar. And he washed the entrails and the legs, and burned them with the burnt offering on the altar.

Then he presented the people's offering, and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people, and killed it, and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one.

And he presented the burnt offering, and offered it according to the rule. And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning.

Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people. And Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar.

But the fat pieces of the ox and of the ram, the fat tail and that which covers the entrails, and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver, they put the fat pieces on the breasts, and he burned the fat pieces on the altar.

[3 : 55] But the breasts and the right thigh, Aaron waved for a wave offering before the Lord, as Moses commanded. Then Aaron lifted up his hands towards the people, and blessed them.

And he came down from offering the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

And fire came out from the Lord, from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt offering, and the pieces of fat on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

And then our second reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, on page 1066 of the Church Bible.

And we'll take up the reading in verse 36. So Luke 23, chapter 23, records the events around the crucifixion of Jesus.

[5 : 15] Jesus being handed over to be crucified, and then his death, and his burial. And chapter 24 of Luke, records the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

First of all, the discovery of the empty tomb, by some of the women disciples. And then in the middle section of the chapter, Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road, walking along the road to Emmaus, and Jesus teaching them, and then their eyes being opened to recognize him. So we're going to read about the evening of that, well, that first Easter Sunday, and then going on to the ascension of Jesus at the end of the chapter.

So Luke 24, 36. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, Peace to you.

They were startled, and frightened, and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?

[6 : 25] See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat?

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

[7 : 49] Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.

And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God. May God bless to us those readings from his word.

Let's... Let's... I'd like us to turn back to the second passage that we read, to Luke chapter 24.

And we're looking just at the very end of that section, from verse 50 to 53. It's the section marked the ascension in our Bibles.

Have you ever had an upwards move? Maybe you were promoted at work. Maybe your football team got promotion. Or maybe you were honoured in some way, elevated to a new position.

[8 : 58] Of course, there's many people this past week who have been moved up to a position in Parliament, elevated to a position of being MPs. Or maybe you've just climbed a hill, and felt the elation of getting to the top, and seeing everything else below you.

Well, today we're looking at the ultimate moving up to the highest position in the universe. This event known as the ascension of Jesus Christ.

It took place 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead. We're told that in Acts chapter 1. It took place in the vicinity of Bethany, near Jerusalem.

So I want to look at this passage under five headings. First of all, blessing. Second, ascension. Third, worship.

Fourth, joy. Joy. And five, blessing. And if you're sharp, you'll have noticed that there's two blessings. Blessing at the beginning and at the end. So the passages are blessing sandwich.

[10 : 08] First of all then, blessing. In verse 50, we read that Jesus, then Jesus led them out, that's the disciples, out as far as Bethany. And lifting up his hands, he blessed them.

So that's the last thing that Jesus does before leaving this world, is to lift up his hands and to bless his disciples. And for his disciples as devout Jews, that would remind them of what happened in the temple every day.

We read from Leviticus chapter 9, where for the first time, Israelite priests took office, Aaron and his sons. And Aaron was the very first high priest.

And in Leviticus chapter 9, Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices for themselves and also for all the people, the Israelites. And then in verse 22 of that chapter, Leviticus 9, we read that Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them.

And this blessing became the regular practice of the high priest. It was part of the daily ritual that happened every day in the temple.

[11 : 30] God also commanded a form of words to be used in this priestly blessing. In Numbers chapter 6, verse 22 and 27, familiar words, the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look with favour on you and give you peace. Now we don't know for sure what words Jesus used in his blessing on this occasion.

But it may well have been these words. In Leviticus 9, the priest blessed the people after having offered sacrifice and that was repeated again and again and again every day in the temple ritual. And one important function of sacrifice was to make atonement for people. In Leviticus 9, 7, Aaron is told, make atonement for yourself and for the people.

And that was done through the sacrifice of all those animals. The animal's life was given to pay for the sins of the people.

[12 : 44] The animal bears the curse of death for their sins in their place. And here in Luke 24, Jesus is being presented as a priest, as a mediator between God and human beings.

And just six weeks before this, Jesus Christ, as a priest, offered a sacrifice. The sacrifice of himself on a cross at Golgotha outside the city wall of Jerusalem.

And that sacrifice of Jesus Christ made atonement for the Israelites and also for people from every nation. Jesus' death was the real, ultimate, final sacrifice to which all the earlier sacrifices were pointers and signposts.

And at Golgotha, Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins, to remove God's curse from us by taking that curse upon himself.

And now, Jesus, as this great high priest, as the mediator between God and humans, he now blesses his disciples.

[14 : 06] And all the content of that blessing, God's favour, God's grace, God's protection, God's presence, God's peace, comes to his disciples.

And that includes us. Today, if we are disciples of Jesus Christ, if we are believers in him. And it comes to us free of cost, but at great cost to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the great high priest, offered himself to atone for our sins so that the blessing of God could come to us. And in this we see the immense grace of the Lord Jesus.

Six weeks earlier, these disciples had deserted Jesus in the hour of his greatest need. They were cowardly, selfish, unworthy, undeserving, and in fact, deserving of God's curse, the opposite of God's blessing.

And we too, today, if we know ourselves, know that we are, we know that we are equally unworthy and undeserving. And yet, the last thing that Jesus does before leaving this world is not to curse, but to bless his disciples.

[15 : 27] And that blessing comes to us today if we believe in him. It comes to all of God's people, all those who are followers, believers, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And my question to you this evening is, are you his disciple? Are you one of his followers? Are you a believer in Jesus Christ?

Are you living under his blessing? So that's the first point, blessing. The second is ascension. Verse 51, we read that while Jesus blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. This is a miraculous, supernatural event. Jesus is physically taken upwards, bodily lifted upwards into the sky.

And this indicates that he is being exalted, that he is attaining a position of highest honor and glory.

[16 : 37] Jesus had said to those two confused and despairing disciples on the road to Dimaeus, in verse 26 of Luke 24, did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then come into his glory?

glory. Well, how does the Messiah come into his glory? Well, it's through his, first of all, his resurrection from the dead and now also his ascension into heaven, his being taken up into heaven. And a huge part of what's going on here is the vindication of Jesus Christ. We know about vindication in different contexts.

For example, in recent months and years, we're aware of the post office scandal, where so many postmasters were wrongly accused of criminal activity, of fiddling the books.

Some of them were put in jail for that and suffered terribly from that. And it was a miscarriage of justice. And of course, just recently, that was overturned in Parliament and they have been vindicated.

[17 : 49] They have been exonerated, their names have been cleared of that crime that they were accused of and which some of them were punished for.

Well, this, both resurrection and ascension, is just the, it's the hugest, most profound vindication of all time.

Just six weeks before this, at the trial of Jesus, we read in Luke 22, 67, those who were trying him, the chief priests and the Jewish ruling council, said to him, if you are the Messiah, then tell us. Jesus replied, if I told you, you would not believe me. And if I asked you, you wouldn't answer. But from now on, the Son of Man, and that's Jesus himself, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God's power.

They all said, are you then the Son of God? He replied, you yourselves say that I am. They said, what more testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth.

[19:03] So Jesus had there claimed that he himself fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 110, what we sung just a few minutes ago, where David says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies as a footstool under your feet.

So the high priests and the Jewish elders had condemned Jesus to death as a blasphemer, as someone who was worthy of death. And they handed him over to the Romans to crucify him. But God had totally turned around their verdict on Jesus. God had vindicated him. And God demonstrates his affirmation of Jesus, first by raising him from the dead, and now by taking him up into heaven.

And it's clear from Acts that his disciples understood this event as an ascension to the right hand of God, to that place of rule and authority and glory, and that that was in fulfillment of Psalm 110.

That's actually I think the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament, and it's quoted in relation to where Jesus is now ascended to the right hand of God.

[20:24] So, first blessing, second ascension, third worship. In verse 52, we read that then they worshipped him. And this seems to be a response to the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Now, we need to be careful with this because the Greek word that is translated by this translation, and most of the translations in English as worshipped, is an ambiguous word.

Sometimes it refers to worship that is offered to God, or indeed in pagan context to other gods. But at other times it can refer to homage or high honour paid to a mere human being.

And it's the context that decides which of those applies. We could translate it as to prostrate oneself. That would be a kind of more neutral translation.

Now, in the other gospels, there are several times, especially in Matthew, where people prostrate themselves before Jesus. And the context suggests that it's probably something less than worship.

[21:37] that is being offered. So, for example, in Matthew 8, verse 2, a man with leprosy prostrates himself before Jesus. It's the same verb that's used. And both the ESV and the NIV translate it that he knelt before him.

Matthew 20, verse 20, we read that the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to Jesus with her sons and kneeling before him, she asked him for something. And that word kneeling is actually, it's the same word.

It's the word *proskeneo* in Greek. And there are other occasions when this verb is used for, when it's very definitely something less than worship. So, for example, in 1 Kings, chapter 1, Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan both prostrate themselves before King David.

And in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which dates from before the time of Jesus, it's the same verb *proskeneo* that's used. But Luke is very sparing in his use of this verb.

He doesn't use this word directed towards Jesus until now, until this point, right at the end of his gospel. And in fact, there's only one previous use of it, which is in Luke chapter 4, verse 8, where Jesus responds to the devil's temptation with words from Deuteronomy 6, verse 13, that you shall prostrate to the Lord your God and serve him only.

[23:10] It's usually translated, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve. Later on in Acts, which was also written by Luke, Cornelius prostrates himself before Peter.

But Peter reacts. He pulls him up and says to Cornelius, get up, I'm only a man like yourself. And so, I think when Luke tells us that the disciples prostrated themselves before Jesus, I think that Luke is communicating to us that they actually worshipped him.

That they offered Jesus what, for monotheistic Jews, was due only to the one God. Now, as first century monotheistic Jews, these disciples, their most basic statement of faith was what's called the Shema.

It's from Deuteronomy 6, verse 4. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

And many Jews recited that twice every day. And so, only something of the most momentous significance could move them to offer worship to a human being.

[24 : 28] But something of the most momentous significance had happened in the resurrection and now the ascension of Jesus Christ. But I don't think this was a sudden conclusion.

I think it had been sort of percolating away for some time. because these disciples had spent about three years with Jesus. They had witnessed the amazing things that he did along with the amazing self-directed claims that he made.

When Jesus calms the storm the disciples are utterly awestruck and afraid and they ask each other who is this? He commands even the wind and the water and they obey him.

And that question who is this is something that they wrestled with and chewed over and I'm sure they discussed among themselves because Jesus claimed the rights and the authority to do things that only God has the right and authority to do.

He claimed that he had the authority to forgive sins. He claimed that he would be the judge on the last day. He calmed the storm which in the Psalms is something that only God does.

[25 : 43] And yet he was very clearly a human being. He got tired and hungry and thirsty. He wept he ate he drank he spoke to God as his father in heaven.

And so it was a puzzle a conundrum the question who is this man? And yet Jesus' resurrection and ascension were such a powerful vindication of all that Jesus claimed God that it seems just all to come together for the disciples.

And maybe they thought of Old Testament passages which speak of God himself returning to Zion to reign. And they realized that Jesus their Lord and teacher somehow embodies this coming of God to reign.

That Jesus shares the identity of the one God they worship. That in Jesus God has come among them. and so they worship him.

Later on the church would work out a formula that there is only one God and that there are three who are called God. The Father and the Son or Word and the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 57] And that these three are distinct from each other and relate to each other as distinct others. And yet there is only one God. It's what we call the Trinity. And I don't think any human being can fully understand it.

There is a mystery to this. But it brings together all these facets of biblical teaching. Including what we find here in the disciples' worship of this man Jesus.

And it's the one thing, that's the most important thing that makes us distinct as disciples of Jesus Christ, as his people, is that we worship him.

We worship this man, Jesus Christ. My question to you is, do you worship him? Not just what you do here in church on a Sunday or when you pray, but the whole of your life is directed towards the glory of Jesus Christ, to serving him, to loving him, to obeying him.

in every area of your life, living for his pleasure and his honour, seeking to proclaim with your words and your life the supreme worth of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 13] And Jesus Christ is worthy of that. Well, fourth, we move to joy. We read that they, in verse 52, that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

joy. Luke begins his gospel with joy. Remember, the angels said to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For today, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord. But then, of course, towards the end of the story, it all goes horribly wrong.

the hero of the story, Jesus is killed in the most brutal and shameful way that we could imagine. And his disciples are filled with despair.

Hope is dead. But now, all of that is turned around with Jesus' victory over death. And now, he's being taken up to heaven, to the right hand of God the Father.

[29 : 24] father. I don't know what you think of our recent Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, whether you loved him or loathed him or somewhere in the middle.

But when he became Prime Minister, and it seems a long time ago now, but when he became Prime Minister, there was some excitement and celebration in India and among many Indians.

And for them, it was a kind of a historic moment because only 75 years earlier, India was under the British Raj. And now, an Indian had the top job in Britain or someone of Indian descent had the top job in Britain.

And there was celebration over that. And I think it was the celebration, the joy that our man, that one of us, is there in that top job and has been elevated to that top post.

Well, here we read that the disciples are filled with joy. Their master, their teacher, the one they had followed for three or so years, has now been elevated to the top position in the whole universe.

[30 : 39] And that is something to celebrate. And it won't be just for a short time like it was for Rishi Sunak and indeed for all others who become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom or anywhere else come to that.

But Jesus Christ is exalted. Jesus Christ reigns forever. And his rule is perfect and just and compassionate and good.

And one day he will reappear and all opposition to his rule will be vanquished. And the disciples are also filled with joy because they've just received blessing from Jesus Christ.

This most powerful person in the universe has blessed them. They have the blessing of forgiveness and peace with God and a new life in him.

Well finally fifthly we come to blessing again. In verse 53 we read that they were continually in the temple blessing God. Luke starts off in the temple with the aged Zachariah receiving a visit from an angel.

[31 : 49] And it now finishes in the temple. The disciples having received blessing bless God in return. Not in the sense that they can give God anything that he needs.

God doesn't need anything from us. But they praise him and some translations translated as they praised God. But when Luke speaks of people being blessed by the Messiah Jesus and then blessing God in return.

I think you may well be thinking of Psalm 72. And with this I close and in fact we're going to close by singing this. But Psalm 72 closes with these words. May his name, that's the Messiah's name, endure forever.

His fame continue as long as the sun. May people be blessed in him. all nations call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.

[33 : 05] And we're going to close by singing those verses from the Scottish Psalter. What? What? Thank you.