

A Pleasing Sacrifice

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[0 : 00] Why shall I pray? Our Father, we thank you that we can gather as brothers and sisters to encourage one another, to grow together, to sit under your word.

I pray that you would be at work in us tonight. I pray that by your spirit, these things would happen. I pray that as we wrestle with this text, you would teach us about yourself so that we might know you better and know how to put these words into practice and become more like you.

Amen. Well, have you ever taken time to prepare something for someone so that it's just right when they arrive?

Maybe a nice meal or a clean house. Doesn't their face when they walk in and see or smell make it all worth it?

Yeah? Do you know that feeling? In recent weeks, I've neglected the big cleaning that I might usually do and Tiff and I have had a bit more on than usual.

[1 : 17] And so the house has suffered a bit. I'm sure you've been there. And we've been a bit like whatever. Well, she's been away the last couple of days and so I spent a bit of extra time tidying up, making it look a bit better around the place.

And she's gotten home since I left this morning. And of course, I'm looking forward to seeing her regardless, right? Of course. But I'm also eager to see a pleased response.

Yeah? You there with me? Yeah, you know. This is a bit like what we're going to see in the offerings in Leviticus 2.

Which when done right, that is, as God desires, he sees and is pleased. In our introduction to Leviticus, we've seen a structure of sacrifice so Israel can live with God present.

And despite Israel's sin, God has shown that he wants their relationship to continue, do you remember? And he calls Moses and invites them near with specific and complex instructions on how to live and offer their lives and sacrifices.

[2 : 35] Atonement. When done correctly, they're accepted by God. They're able to remain. Last week, you probably remember, we began with quite a grotesque picture in the tent of meeting.

Blood and body parts everywhere. But I mean, isn't that what we should expect for atonement? Death and blood?

Like Jesus died after all. We know that. Well, today, did you notice there's no blood? There's no death?

Yet there is offering and sacrifice. Well, tonight, it's the offering of grain. And to help, we're going to think about how, what and why this should be offered.

From the start, despite there being no death, there's still a lot similar. Have a look from verse 1. When anyone brings a grain offering to the Lord, their offering is to be of the finest flour.

[3 : 49] They had to pour olive oil on it, put incense on it, and take it to Aaron's sons, the priest. The priest shall take a handful of flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar.

A food offering and aroma pleasing to the Lord. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons. It is the most holy part of the food offerings presented to the Lord.

God still cares about how they offer or the kind of offerings they bring. And to be specific, top tier. Did you notice the finest flour? How do they offer? Well, still at the tent of meeting and still with the priests. Like before, the priests have an important role in this offering, don't they?

Firstly, they burn the memorial portion. And that means the part of the sacrifice or the offering that goes up to God.

[4 : 52] In a sense, it's like what he receives or what he accepts. What becomes a pleasing aroma to him. Sometimes in the New Testament, even prayers are talked about like this.

The Lord has heard your prayers. Your prayers have gone up to God. But the priests aren't only helping offer by burning the memorial portion.

They also keep some for themselves. Did you see that? And interestingly, even what is left for the priests, that is for the Lord.

Both the part which is burned and the food offering. Says something interesting about the priest, doesn't it? What's theirs is God's. There's also instructions about how the grains come.

We saw they might be raw. That is a handful of flour or cooked, it goes on to say. Either pan or oven cooked. Like the burnt offering, there's freedom, isn't there, in this offering.

[6 : 03] Just like different animals, so different forms of flour or bread. But of course, there are very specific instructions, very specific ingredients.

And each time, like in the previous chapter, we see repeated, a food offering presented to the Lord, and then aroma pleasing to the Lord. This is how the offering should come out.

Done right, the Lord pleased. So we know God cares how his people offer. It's important to figure out what he wants.

Let's read a couple more verses from verse 4. Have a look. If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of the finest flour, either thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, or with thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with olive oil.

If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of the finest flour mixed with oil and without yeast. We know that God cares about quality, don't we?

[7 : 17] So it turns out tip-top is not the one. I'm sorry. It's not what he's after. It's the finest, isn't it?

Cooked or raw. But what specifically? Well, flour. Comes up a lot, doesn't it? Five times at least. But there's more than that. Did you see what else?

Olive oil is pretty key, and incense too. And sometimes the offering will be the first fruits of the grain, which means not even flour, simply straight off the stalk.

But there was more than this that God wanted in the offering. And some specific ingredients, which at the same time might sound strange, but a bit familiar.

And they are a handful of mentions of yeast, plus honey, and salt too. Now you'd probably say these are all things you might want in your bread.

[8 : 17] Some of the time, some all the time, yeah? But God has very strict instructions about the inclusion of these ingredients.

And two of these, you'd probably want in your bread all the time, I reckon. Yeast, salt, but God has some really strong feelings about them, doesn't he?

Five times in three verses, God says, no yeast, not in any offering. It's like, keep that filthy fungus out of there.

It's pretty interesting, isn't it? And also salt, sure, happy to go without yeast, done that before, but salt, well, it's a different tune, isn't it?

Because three times in verse 13, it says, do not leave salt out of the offering. Make sure you season every one.

[9 : 21] And finally, honey, or honey and bread. It's like a match made in heaven, isn't it?

Crumpets. But honey is out. No honey or yeast to be burnt in a food offering presented to the Lord.

No sweet tooth, it seems. Is this strange, considering where God is bringing them to a land flowing with milk and honey?

Does God just have a vendetta against them? Well, you know what? I think it's really hard to say. Here, in this passage, the prohibition is clear, isn't it?

And when God's people are gathering for a feast of unleavened bread, well, that feels expected, doesn't it? It feels very familiar. But, you know, later in Leviticus, and then another time in Israel's history under Hezekiah, both bread, sorry, both bread with yeast and honey were offered acceptably to God.

So, it's really hard to say for sure. salt, on the other hand, is said to be added for a reason. Do not leave out the salt of the covenant.

[10 : 38] Adding salt, God says, ought to remind you of the covenant I have with you. And what's interesting, you might have thought this already, yeast and salt feature heavily in the New Testament, don't they?

The one should be left out because of the damage it causes, yeast, leaven. What's it compared to? Boasting, malice, wickedness, because of the way it spreads through the body like yeast through

the dough.

The other should be part of you because of its positive effect, salt. Disciples who are distinct, who stand out not to lose their saltiness.

God is specific and intentional about what he wants in his offering just as he is with what he wants from his people both then and now.

So now we need to ask why, don't we? Why this offering? What is the point? like last week and really lots of the passages in Leviticus it's easy to read a passage like this and be like what even is the point?

[12:02] It doesn't say sin. We talked about that last week. It doesn't mention atonement either. So what? Well it's because of how the Lord feels about it and that is a pleasing aroma.

Last week we talked about that foul smelling old blood and wondered if God was into that, do you remember? But it's not quite the smell that God is about but the character of the offering.

That is the way in which the offering is carried out, coming before him according to his desire, his intention. I wonder if you can imagine this perhaps a person who's getting applause and enjoying it like too much.

You know I can only sort of imagine it in a comedy context where a joke is sort of encouraging the applause a little too much like oh wow you know what I mean?

Can you imagine that? or picture where we started coming home to that cooked meal even when you've cooked yourself. You guys are all over that aren't you?

[13:24] When the aroma really begins to pop you know the garlic the onion the spices you open the lid for more actually I think in those circumstances someone else coming and smelling and appreciating your cooking what you've done that can be a pleasing aroma to you can't it?

Like what I mentioned about my house coming home tonight the unburdened feeling the smile of relief and so they bring the grain offering or the burnt offering according to the Lord's instructions without yeast the salt of a covenant regardless of smell this is what God desires he sees it and it goes up to him as a pleasing aroma aroma the grain offering is at the same time like but also a bit on its own like the others but a bit on its own it's an offering that God requests according to specific instructions and accepts when done right and while there's no death and blood there is a pleasing aroma to the Lord and we saw a lot of that last week now you might find this strange or unexpected because we are sinful aren't we and we don't deserve to live in

God's presence and the New Testament says the wages of sin is death and so Jesus had to die to set us free from sin but Leviticus is showing us that there are many sacrifices and offerings excuse me and each can produce a pleasing aroma to the Lord what we see is what God desires from his people which is not simply flour and oil but the character of a pleasing aroma so take the New Testament passage that Josh read before there were a number of types of characters present do you remember just consider what Mary did she poured a year's worth of wages in perfume on Jesus feet firstly imagine the smell literally verse 3 says that the house was filled with the fragrance of oil I bet it was compare what Mary did with Judas who wanted the money for himself the chief priest who wanted to kill Lazarus who had been recently resurrected Mary made a great smell yes but also she abandoned all concern so she could honour Jesus for his death and burial she didn't care about the money she cared about her Lord who was about to die Judas and the chief priest cared about themselves which aroma was pleasing to the Lord last week we began to talk a bit about our offering didn't we let's think more about it how will you offer what will you offer and why I think there's a few things we can think about but first it's good to remember what this offering isn't that is this offering isn't what

Jesus has done because I hope it's obvious Jesus has done it his is the sacrifice that restores relationship between us and God he is the reason that we can have this discussion and consider what is our offering not for salvation but because of it like Mary she knew how precious Jesus was how great it was what he was going to do so she gave even a year's wages how should we offer in light of Jesus offering to please God a year's wages more less well the way we offer should be costly whatever it is like

[18:37] Israel who offered their first fruits or Mary often I think I make my decisions about offering depending on what I can manage think of giving for example the issue that I recognize in me is that I'm thinking about myself will I be okay will I have enough it's a me focused decision rather than a God focused decision it's because of what I have or what I think I can manage rather than because of what I know God is like because of what I know Jesus has done that's the wrong way around isn't

it we can think about this about regarding money but it could also apply to time couldn't it and sure this challenge this might be a challenge to rethink your church or ministry commitment but

I tend to consider instead the personal time the time that would be devoted to God when I'm extra busy or when unexpected things happen again it's a me focused decision rather than a God focused decision what do I need to care for myself and so I do not give my I do not give God my first fruits that's for sure but really any of my time I instinctively end up looking after number one which means worry about sleep which is not that well consume media unhealthily shirk chores mentioned that already unhealthy work habits you know

I'm constantly amazed how quickly prayer falls out of the habit when life takes a turn because you can do it when you're driving or when you're walking do you notice that whatever our offerings are they will be costly secondly what will they be time prayer money I'm sure these things will be included if our heart is where Mary's was but more I think even our whole lives Paul says in Romans 12 I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship a sacrifice in which there is no death yet holy and pleasing to God because of what Jesus has done because of the life he's given and the life you've received so a life of sacrifice not in guilt not in payment but in love in worship it will not be your time it is

God's time it will not be your money it is God's money it will be hard a daily sacrifice not just our actions but our lives giving up the good we have in honour of our God as a holy and pleasing aroma to the Lord what a great cost why should we do this why should we offer so much because such a life is holy and pleasing to God let me ask for God's strength to do it Father thanks for the salvation that we can have because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus thanks that we don't have to die in our sin thanks

Father that you have shown us in your word the kind of life that you do desire from us help us we ask to offer our lives as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to you Amen