

Life with a Holy God

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[0 : 0 0] It would be great if you could turn back in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 40 at the beginning of Leviticus. Today's sermon is going to be a little bit different and so it'll be a little while before we get to the Bible readings, although I'll put those on the screen as well for those online.

But let me begin with a question. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be? Anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Why don't you take a moment to talk to the person beside you or around you. Where would you live? All right, what did some people say?

Who's happy to call out an answer? Timbuktu. Paris. Yeah, I was thinking more along those lines as well.

Somewhere warm. Yes, somewhere warm. I had a bomber supporter say this morning, Essendon. That's where he would live, Essendon. Well, if we ask God this question, do you know what he would say?

[1 : 0 9] Not Timbuktu, but with you. That's where God wants to live. Oh, sure, in one sense, God is everywhere, but the one place he really desires to dwell is with people, which is extraordinary when you think about it.

I mean, some of my own family don't like living with me. I don't know why. But God desires to dwell with people like Israel. And that's the whole point of the tabernacle that was in our first reading.

A place for God to dwell. And because it happens just before the book of Leviticus, we're going to be thinking a bit about the background and why Leviticus is here in the Bible.

Because I doubt Leviticus is in your top five books of the Bible. Is it up there? Is it in top five favorite books? Unlikely.

And so, as I said, to help orientate you, we're going to do something a bit different today and just do a bit of a kind of overview background, beginning with the story so far. So we're at point one on your outlines, and this will be the longest point.

[2 : 1 9] Point two will be very short. And so, just remember, Israel was subject to slavery in Egypt. And so, this is a screenshot from the Prince of Egypt, DreamWorks.

So, Israel was made to be slaves in Egypt, but then God saved them through Moses. And I'm sure you all remember the story of the Red Sea. And Moses led them to Mount Sinai to meet with God.

And there at Mount Sinai, God tells them that he saved them from slavery for relationship. A relationship which is often described by the phrase, I will be your God and you will be my people.

Or sometimes it's the other way around. And in fact, God actually told them this before he rescued them. As early as Exodus chapter 6, before the plagues, before the Red Sea, God said to Moses,

Say to the Israelites, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves. I will redeem or rescue you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. And I will take you as my people and I will be your God.

[3 : 3 7] Relationship. And he will lead them to the land he promised. You see, they are rescued for relationship. And after he saves them, he kind of proposes to formalize that relationship with a covenant agreement.

And so later on, after he's brought them to Sinai, he says in these well-known verses from Exodus 19, You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself here at Mount Sinai.

And now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

And notice, by the way, the bits in yellow there highlight that their rescue is all by grace. God does everything, doesn't he?

You see what I did, how I carried and brought you to myself. They're saved by grace. And just like we are through Christ.

[4 : 49] And notice what God proposes. If they obey him, then they will have a, firstly, a special purpose, which is highlighted in the yellow.

To be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. A priest is someone who had special access to God, but also would help other people come to God as well.

And so that's the way he says, although the whole earth is mine, you're going to have a special role to play within it. You're going to be a kingdom of priests. And how would they be a priest to the nations around them?

Well, by being holy. Those two things go together. That is, by reflecting God's holy character. You see, just as humanity was created to be image bearers of God, to reflect his loving rule over the world.

So Israel was to reflect God's holy character to the world. And to be holy means to be set apart as different, but in a good way to the nations.

[6 : 02] More pure, more loving, more righteous. And in this way, they would act as kingdom of priests and help people come to God. How would this work?

Well, the nations would see them and perhaps think, oh, their way is different, but good. That their God might be different and good too.

Let's go and check him out. And then worship him too. It kind of reminds me of the Aldi evangelism approach.

You know the slogan for Aldi? Good, different. And so Israel were to be good, different, you see. To be noticed by the people around them. And to help them to come and shop with God, rather than Aldi, so to speak.

It's similar for us too. We're to make the gospel attractive by the way we live good, different lives. What's more, they not only had a special purpose, but they would be a special people, a treasured possession, as it's highlighted there in yellow.

[7 : 09] This phrase is used in the Bible for the king's private and prized collection. And so although the whole earth is God's, Israel would be his most treasured people.

It's kind of like a toy of mine, which is a transformer. I don't know if you remember these from your grandkids. They're robots who transformed and things. And here I've got Optimus Prime, which was the leader of the goodies.

This is the very first toy I ever bought with my pocket money. It's almost 40 years old. It still has the original foam packaging. You see, this is my prized possession.

And because it is, I always dwelt with it, never to leave it nor forsake it, but to provide a place for it as we moved house to house in our married lives, 14 times I think we're up to.

And not only provide a place for it, but protect it from my young son when he wanted to play with it to see if it could fly. The point is, Israel would be God's treasured possession, just like we are in Christ.

[8 : 21] And it's God's treasured possession. He would never leave them nor forsake them, but would provide for them and protect them. But part of this relationship and the way God would be with them and provide for them and so on was by dwelling with them, living amongst them, to relate with them, but also to protect and provide for them.

In other words, to bless them. In fact, God always desired to dwell with them. It's part of the reason he rescued them from Egypt.

So a little bit later on in Exodus 29, so we're past chapter 19 in the covenant. This is what he reminds them. And when they start talking about the tabernacle, he says, they will know that I am the Lord, their God who brought them out of Egypt.

Why? Well, this time so that I might dwell amongst them. This is part of the relationship you see, where he is their God and they are his treasured people.

And so a huge chunk of the end of Exodus, some 13 chapters are devoted to the building of the tabernacle so that God can dwell amongst the people.

[9 : 45] And by the end of Exodus, God fills this tabernacle with his presence, which finally brings us to our reading. Exodus 40 verse 34.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. At this point, it's at this point that God now dwells with Israel.

But notice also there in the yellow that this tabernacle is called a tent of meeting. Because God would also meet with Israel there.

Again, this is what he said earlier in the book of Exodus. At the entrance to this tent of meeting, I will meet. That's why it's called tent of meeting, right? I will meet with the Israelites and the place will be consecrated by my glory.

And so it seems dwelling with Israel is part of this relationship. And it's for two reasons. One, so that Israel could meet with God to worship him and to bring him offerings of thanks for saving him or saving them.

[10:54] But also to dwell amongst them so that Israel would be assured that God was with them. Never to leave them nor forsake them as his treasured people, but to provide the blessings of protection and provision on the way to their promised land.

And in fact, even in the promised land. And it's that second reason that you kind of get the sense of in the following verses of our reading.

So in the Bible, chapter 40, verse 36, in all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out.

But if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. And so the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day and the fire was in the cloud by night in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

You see, the only time God's presence lifted from the tabernacle, from this tent, was so that they could pack it up and move to another place.

[12:01] But the rest of the time, verse 38, the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, the fire by night, so that people would see that God was with them.

It's kind of like the title slide in the picture there. There's the tent of meeting right in the middle there, all the Israelite tents around the outside, and that fire was in the cloud by night.

So that it was in the sight of all Israel. They could see that God was with them, which reassured them that he would never leave nor forsake them, but would continue to provide and protect them.

It's kind of like a toddler playing at a park. Have you ever seen this? Perhaps with grandkids or nieces and nephews. A toddler is playing at the park and then suddenly they just look over and make sure they can still see their parent.

And when they can, they know everything's right in the world. Their parent is still with them to look after them, to provide for them and the like. Well, here is the tabernacle in the middle of the camp with the cloud and the fire so all Israel could see that everything was all right.

[13:10] God was with them. But then comes a problem. Point two. If you look back at verse 35 of our reading, we read in verse 35, Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Moses could not enter the tent of meeting as he entered the other tent of meeting earlier in the book. And in fact, when we come to the first verse of Leviticus chapter one, the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from inside the temple or inside the tent of meeting.

In other words, Moses is on the outside and God's got to call out to him. Kind of like a parent inside calling out to their child in the backyard because Moses cannot enter it.

You see, before earlier in that Exodus chapter 33, Moses set up another tent outside the camp of Israel and he could go in and meet with God.

But now that this tabernacle was in the middle of the Israelite camp, he wasn't allowed to go in anymore. Why? Because of the sin of the people.

[14:35] And so how can Moses meet with God inside this tent? But more to the point, how can a sinful people meet with a holy God at the entrance of the tent?

In fact, how can a holy God even continue to dwell amongst the Israelites who were sinful?

Because as you know, sin and holiness simply doesn't mix, does it?

I don't know if you've been wondering what this was. I don't know if you noticed it or not. But you know what it is, don't you? You know, extra virgin olive oil, extra pure, holy God, doesn't mix with water.

You can shake it and it looks like it mixes for a little while, but it doesn't take too long before it separates. sin and holiness simply can't mix.

And so how can a holy God, now that he's finally in the tabernacle, continue to dwell amongst his people? What's the solution?

[15:36] Point three. Well, at this point, the solution is the book of Leviticus. Because in this book, God provides a way for a sinful people to meet with a holy God.

And for a holy God to continue dwelling amongst a sinful people. For it speaks about how to approach God with sacrifices of atonement, that atone pays for sin, cleanses them so that they can come and meet with God at the entrance.

It talks about other sacrifices of worship in response, in thankful response. In fact, the first seven chapters of Leviticus are about five different sacrifices.

that they can make. I've put two basic outlines on the back of your outline. One outline of the book of Leviticus is a concentric one which highlights the day of atonement in the middle.

Because the day of atonement is all about atoning for sin, paying for sin and cleansing people so that they could keep meeting with the holy God and he could keep dwelling amongst them.

[16:49] But it's a very broad one. You've got to make it broad to make it fit the little concentric thing. So the second outline is a bit more, has a bit more detail and it's a bit more of a linear or a logical progression to show you why one thing follows the other.

Because once you've got sacrifices, who do you need to make the sacrifices? You need the priests. And so next after sacrifices come priests and worship and so on. Either way, the book, it's the book that enables a sinful people to meet with a holy God and for a holy God to continue dwelling amongst a sinful people.

And in fact, the book actually shows them how to be holy as well so they can fulfill their special purpose, remember? To be a holy nation so that people might come to God through them.

The Aldi evangelism approach, remember? Yes, the book rightly reminds us of God's holy character but it's also a book about God's gracious provision for Israel to keep dwelling with God.

In fact, even by chapter 9 when we've got these sacrifices and priests, this is what we read. Moses and Aaron then went, notice, 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.

[18:17] 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 in worship.

You see, Leviticus is the means by which Israel can continue to live with a holy God in joyful worship. In fact, it's literally at the centre of the Pentateuch.

The Pentateuch is the name for the first five books of the Bible. And it's what allows Israel to move from Exodus where they've been rescued for a relationship to Numbers when they start travelling towards the promised land.

In fact, something just little to notice in Leviticus chapter 1 verse 1 which we read the Lord God called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

But then after the book of Leviticus comes the book of Numbers and notice it begins by saying the Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting. What's caused that change where Moses has to stay out but now can come in?

[19:28] Well, it's the book of Leviticus you see. When you heard this morning that we were starting a series in this book I wonder what you first thought.

Levit's what? Or why on earth did he choose that one? Or I knew I should have stayed in bed this morning. But my hope is that you'll get a greater picture of God as we look at this book.

Not just his holiness which is a big theme but also of his grace in providing a way for Israel to enjoy life with him.

Or for us pointing us to God's gracious provision in Christ who enables us to enjoy life with God. God's holiness and so the first application for us this morning is simply to realize that Leviticus is worth reading. It gives us a greater picture of God's holiness and also of his gracious provision for us in Christ.

[20:37] And the second application is to rejoice afresh that God really desires to dwell with us. even if our family doesn't sometimes want to.

In fact for us God sent his only son to make it happen didn't he? For as you know Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice for sin he's the ultimate priest for us and he's even the ultimate tabernacle or tent of meeting.

In John's gospel we read the word that is Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling the word is literally tabernacled amongst us because in Christ God dwells and by his sacrifice and priesthood we can come near to God just before our second reading it says for through him on the screen through Christ we both Jew and Gentile have access to the father by one spirit and notice when we believe in Jesus we are united to him and next line in Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord and so in Christ we too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit you see when we believe in Jesus we become the tabernacle in Christ

God dwells in us by his spirit and so this means we don't have to go to the temple or even to church to meet with God and worship him we can pray to him anytime anywhere we can worship him with a life of obedience anytime anywhere in fact we are meant to be living sacrifices all the time but it also means we have great assurance that he is with us never to leave us nor forsake us as his treasured people but to bless us with spiritual protection and provision whatever we need to make it to the new creation and there in the new creation as we read in revelation where there's a new heavens and a new earth God's dwelling place is now amongst all his people and he will dwell with them they will be his people

God will be their God and it will come with every physical blessing no more tears no more mourning no more death only life last week I heard about the brother of someone I know who lives overseas and has retired sold his business and he's decided that he wants to spend some time with the extended family so he's asked them to join them for a holiday in Italy the family live in Melbourne and he's rented a huge place this is an exact one but it's kind of like this place I kid you not although it's on a cliffside so it's probably more like that but there are a few barriers for his family to go and dwell there with him aren't there like money but yet because he really wants to dwell with them and enjoy life together he's paid for the accommodation the food and the flights and anything else they need to get there true story great cost but that's how much he wants to dwell with them and the point is

[24 : 35] Leviticus points us to Jesus in whom God gave at great cost to overcome all the barriers so that we could dwell with him and he with us that we might enjoy life together as his people and he our God that's how much he wants to dwell not in Italy but with you and me isn't that extraordinary let's pray and give thanks our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for this reminder of how you rescued your people Israel for relationship but also to dwell amongst them as their God and they your treasured people and father we thank you for the book of Leviticus that it reminds us not just about how you are a holy God but how you also graciously provide a way for us to continue to dwell with you and you with us for it points us to the

Lord Jesus Christ so help us to rejoice afresh we pray that you really desire to dwell with us may we continue to be thankful for it and enjoy the assurance that it gives us that you are always with us we ask it in Jesus name Amen