

A Sacrifice to Celebrate

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[0:00] Well, as you are, please turn in your Bibles back to page 100. Well, it finally happened last night, didn't it? After all the hoo-ha, and Harry made it.

I don't know who watched it or who didn't, but we watched some of it, well, most of it actually. And I was interested to hear that the state coach, Horson coach, the black one that he went to the Abbey on, was made in Australia.

Yeah, yeah, it came with suspension and electric windows. Wow. But it was also to hear the name of Christ mentioned so often, wasn't it?

And to celebrate his coronation, the king is having a coronation big lunch today. And he's actually inviting, it's a bit hard to see on the red underline there, but he's inviting not just all of those across the UK, but in brackets, even the world, to join in and have a coronation big lunch.

That includes us. And they're offering to help some coronation big lunch packs, which were available before this weekend. And so I thought, oh, well, I'll sign up.

[1:11] And so I did. I signed up and requested a pack to help me. Would you like to know what I got in my pack? Yes? Okay. Well, wait for it. Here it was. A printable coloring in crown.

Okay. Okay. Some conversation starters, which are a bit more helpful if you're having a lunch with people in your street or that sort of thing. And a recipe for orange cupcakes.

And that was it. I was hoping for a little bit more, I must confess. Though, to be fair, it's a bit hard to provide anything more for the whole world, isn't it? But here's the point.

This lunch is meant to be eaten together in fellowship as a celebration of thanksgiving for their new king.

And today, as we come to the next sacrifice in the book of Leviticus, the fellowship offering, it's like that coronation big lunch. It's meant to be eaten together in fellowship as a celebration of thanksgiving to God, the true king.

[2:20] And I don't know if you picked up those repeating phrases as Andre read our passage to us. But rather than working our way through the passage, because these phrases are repeated, I've actually put them together in a table, which is on the back of your outline as well.

It's a bit small on the screen, I realize. And so you can see there's three columns for the three different animals that were part of this particular sacrifice. And there's often repeated phrases like being presented to God, laying your hands, splashing blood, and so on.

And these repeated phrases across the rows actually point to the purpose of this particular sacrifice. And it's a twofold purpose.

The first purpose is to atone for our sin. And so you can see the first three rows mentioned in the first part of every animal.

So like in verses one to two, we are told that they are to present an animal to the Lord, that is to be without defect.

[3:29] And then they're to lay their hands on it and slaughter it. And then thirdly, the third row, the priest is to splash the blood against the altar. And these three rows of your table, these three repeated phrases that come up in the columns, point to the purpose of this sacrifice making atonement.

So, for example, the idea of it being without defect, although there is one exception to that later on, but it had to be without defect, not just because part of it was being given to God, and you don't give God your defects, do you?

But the other reason is to be without defect is because it was going to be a substitute. It was going to be offered on your behalf. In fact, later on in Leviticus, that's what we're told.

Do not bring anything with a defect because it will not be accepted on your behalf. It was their substitute. It was going to take their place and pay for their sin, which is why Jesus had to be without sin or defect, so to speak, so he could take our place and pay for our sin.

This idea of substitution is emphasised by the fact that the person offering had to lay their hand on the head of the animal, which is the second row there, because, again, it was acting as their substitute.

[4:57] It's kind of like when I used to play soccer before my knee surgeries and the like. Whenever we would sub off or sub on, the people on the team, we'd just kind of high-five each other, like tag each other.

And that was symbolising that you're now subbing in to play in my place. Well, in a similar way, placing your hand was like tagging the animal, to not play soccer in your place, but to be slaughtered in your place.

And in the third row, the blood is then splashed against the altar, because it's blood that makes atonement, that pays our ransom and purifies us, because that's what sin does.

Sin does two things. It firstly makes us unclean, that is, it keeps us away from God. And secondly, it makes us guilty, deserving of the penalty of death before God.

But sin ransoms us. It pays our penalty and our place so that we can live, and it purifies us, cleanses us, so that we can live with God.

[6:11] That's why it was slaughtered at the entrance of the tent of meeting, the passage says, because it enabled them to meet with God, to come close, having been cleansed.

And blood does these two things. It atones in these two ways. And that's why at the end of our passage here, in verse 17, which is like the concluding statement, Israel were not to eat any blood.

Whenever they had a barbecue, it was always well done steak, not medium rare or rare, no blood. Because blood was sacred, so sacred, it could be used only for atonement.

In fact, we're told later on in Leviticus, the reason why, because the life of a creature is in the blood. The blood represents life. And God says, I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar.

It is a blood that makes atonement for one's life. Blood for blood, life for life. Therefore, I say to the Israelites, and none of you may eat blood, nor any foreigner.

[7:18] Of course, for us, this animal's blood points us to the blood of Jesus, as we saw a couple of weeks ago with the burnt offering, the first one we looked at with Ricky. And we had this passage for our service from 1 Peter, where we are ransomed, not with the blood of a cow or sheep or goat, but with the precious blood of Christ, who, notice, was a lamb without defect, without blemish.

But Jesus' blood not only ransoms us from the penalty of death so that we can live, it also purifies us so that we can live with God. And so 1 John puts it like that.

The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin, makes us clean, so that we can live with God every day.

And if you're here this morning, or you're tuning in online, and you want fellowship with God in this life, and the guarantee of eternal physical life to come in the next, then the only way that's possible is by trusting in Jesus and His precious blood.

Because that's the only thing that makes atonement for sin, you see. And if we don't trust in Jesus, then we have to pay the penalty or the ransom for our own sin, and we'll remain separated from God.

[8 : 48] And separation from God is what the Bible calls hell. So it kind of matters, doesn't it? But that's the first purpose of this sacrifice, to atone for sin.

The second purpose was to eat together in fellowship. Point two. And we see this, by the way, only parts of the animal were offered to God as a food offering, which is rows four and five on your table.

And we see that in verses three to five in your Bibles, actually, where we're told that all the fat and the internal organs are taken out of the cow or the sheep or the goat.

And only that part is placed on the altar and given as a food offering, an aroma pleasing to God. That's how God ate it, right? By smelling the aroma from it as a pleasing aroma.

But only the fat and the internal organs were given to God. Now, I know that doesn't sound very appetizing to us, does it? When we've taught that fat equals heart disease or calories and the like.

[10 : 00] But I think deep down, we know that it's still can be pretty tasty, right? I mean, think pork crackling, crispy bacon, even, dare I say, KFC, crispy chicken.

You know, the chicken. I know we're not supposed to like, we're not meant to like it, but it is tasty. And since God is God, then the most tasty bits belong to Him.

It's why, again, at the end of the chapter in verse 17, Israel were not only to refrain from eating blood, but also from eating fat. Because the end of verse 16 says, all the fat is the words.

And there was a bit of a practical point to this fat as well. Because in verse 5, there on the screen, you've got the morning sacrifice of the burnt offering, which was the whole animal.

That was the whole thing that was killed and dedicated to God. And we're told to put the fat on top of that, which would have helped burn all that meat, you see. Because if you've ever barbecued and some fat has dripped down onto a flame, what happens?

[11 : 09] Yeah, fireballs, doesn't it? And so it would have helped cook that burnt offering from that morning. But here's the thing. If God got all the fat and internal organs, what happened to the rest of the cow?

Or the sheep? Or the goat? I mean, there's a whole lot more to be consumed, isn't there? For a cow, there's the chuck steak, the ribeye, sirloin, the t-bones, the rump, I mean, where's all this meat going?

If God gets just the fat. What happens to it? Well, in Leviticus, the first five sacrifices that take up chapters one to five largely are then repeated in chapters six and seven, but with a different focus.

In chapters one to five, the focus is on presenting them to God and which animals, you know, cattle, sheep, pigeons, that sort of thing. But later in chapter six and seven, the focus is on eating them with God.

And so when we have a look at the fellowship offering in chapter seven, we find out what happens to the rest of the meat. And so for starters, the priest shall burn the fat on the altar. This is of the fellowship offering as we've just seen that.

[12:26] But the breast of the animal belongs to Aaron and his sons, the priests in general. But the son of Aaron, the particular priest who offers the blood and the fat of the fellowship offering, well, that particular priest has the right thigh as his share.

And so I guess that means the priests in general, the breast is probably the brisket. You know, they could cook it South American style, Southern American style, you know, low and slow in a smoker or something or other.

But the particular priest got the right thigh, which is probably the round steak, I guess. But what about the rest? Well, we're told also in chapter 7 that as for the other meats, anyone ceremonially clean may eat it.

In other words, this was the fellowship, this was the offering that the people could eat, the only one. And it's why the animal had to be a pretty big size.

With the burnt offering, that with the whole thing was given to God and burnt on the altar, for poor people, they could offer a bird or a pigeon, a quail. But can you imagine dividing up a quail amongst the whole family of cousins and extended, you know, you'd get maybe a foot or something, I don't know.

[13:44] It's not very big, is it? And that's why it's not included in the fellowship offering. It's only a cow, a sheep or a goat, big enough for everyone to enjoy.

The point is, this was a sacrifice to be eaten together with God as the honoured guest. So God got the luxurious fat bits, the priests got the breast and the thigh, and the people got the rest.

It was a meal eaten together to express and enjoy their fellowship with one another, hence, fellowship offering. But they will only do this on special occasions when they were also giving thanks to God for something good in life, for some peace they enjoyed.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. If you heard of this word shalom before, I think it gets spandied around a bit. But it's more than just peace from war, it's broader than that.

It includes the peaceful life, all the good things in life. And so whenever Israelites experience some peace from God, some peace in life, that would bring a fellowship offering to God in thanksgiving.

[15:01] And that's why some Bibles actually call it fellowship offering because it's fellowship with one another. But some Bibles call it a peace offering because it's given in thanksgiving for some peace they enjoyed.

The point is, this is not just to be eaten together in fellowship, but also as a celebration of thanksgiving. Point three. Here I do want you to turn your Bibles to chapter seven and we'll look at a few verses together.

Although I think I'll put them on the screen for those at home as well. This is where we pick up the fellowship offering again. It's chapter 7:11, top of page 104.

You can see the heading fellowship offering in your Bibles there. And notice how the idea of thanksgiving is highlighted. So verse 11 to 15.

He says, these are the regulations for the fellowship offering anyone may present to the Lord. If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering, they are to offer thick loaves made without yeast and olive oil mixed in, thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with oil, and thick loaves of the finest flour well kneaded and with oil mixed in.

[16:16] Along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving, they are to present an offering with thick loaves of bread made with yeast and they are to bring one of each kind as an offering, as a contribution to the Lord.

It belongs to the priest who splashes the blood of the fellowship offering against the altar. The meat of their fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the day it is offered.

They must leave none of it until morning. And so here, did you notice the repeated idea of thanksgiving? And this was the offering to bring on a particular occasion to give thanks to God.

Perhaps for some blessing or some shalom in life, whether the birth of a child or an answered prayer. We see an example of this in Psalm 107 for example, they cried out to the Lord, they prayed to God for help in their trouble and He saved them, He answered their prayer.

And so let them give thanks verse 21 which included verse 22 sacrifice a thank offering. That's this fellowship one here.

[17:26] They'd come to the temple, present the animal, say what they're thankful for, sacrifice it as atonement for sin so they could meet with God and then enjoy fellowship with each other and God together.

It was meant to be a party in other words. In fact, you even had to bring some loaves of bread and give some to the priests so that it really was a meal. It wasn't just steak, it was steak sandwiches if you like.

And the fact that you had to eat the whole cow in the same day, can you imagine trying to get through that, a whole cow in one day? It kind of forced you to eat with other people to help, didn't it?

Forced you to have fellowship but also remember meat was a luxury so it forced you to indulge if you like, to make it a celebration. This was a celebration of thanksgiving to God.

And so the point is these fellowship offerings were not just to atone for sin, they were primarily to eat together in fellowship as a celebration of thanksgiving to God.

[18:31] And that's what we see happening in Deuteronomy where they go to the temple, wherever the temple was, the tabernacle was at Shiloh, then Jerusalem, and notice in the yellow, rejoice before the Lord your God, not just you but your sons and daughters, your male and female servants and the priests, the Levites.

It's a celebration of thanksgiving in fellowship with one another. But what does all this mean for us? Well, Christ has replaced the temple and the tabernacle so we don't have to go there to meet with God, we are with God by His Spirit everywhere.

And as we've already seen, Christ's blood atones for our sins so that we continue to be with God, we can continue to meet with God. And so Christ fulfills that first purpose, really.

But what about the second purpose, eating together in fellowship as a celebration of thanksgiving? Well, I think one way we fulfill that is the Lord's Supper. For here we eat together in fellowship, don't we?

As a celebration of thanksgiving for Christ. In fact, in our first reading we heard how it was originally a meal, wasn't it? Only the Corinthians were going overboard and some of them were getting drunk and pigging out on all the food and those who came later after work were going hungry.

[19:52] But it was originally a meal, a special meal, a special occasion where they would make it a celebration of thanksgiving for Christ.

And that's what we do as well, obviously not with the whole meal but with just little elements of the meal where we eat together in fellowship and where we are to give thanks to God.

That's why during the Lord's Supper we have some parts like this bit, you know, lift up your heart and you say, and then we say, let us give thanks to God the Father.

Thanksgiving is part of the Lord's Supper, isn't it? Because this is what we're to do. And so let's not forget that joyful thanks.

I think we're so used to doing the Lord's Supper and celebrating Christ's death. We get the fellowship idea because we do it together. We get to do it worthily because we always say the confession beforehand.

[20 : 55] But don't forget to do it joyfully. The fact that Christ has died for us to give us eternal life, is that not something worth giving joyful thanks for?

But the second way I think we can fulfill this fellowship offering is at other special occasions. It's interesting in the parable of the prodigal son, when the son returns home, which is a special occasion, what does the father do?

He kills the fattened calf. This is a fellowship offering. And they celebrate. The early church constantly met together in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, thanking or praising God.

What was this special occasion? Well, he was adding to their number daily. People were becoming Christians left, right and center. And so they were meeting together as a celebration of Thanksgiving.

It's another fellowship offering, if you like. On Friday night, my daughter went to her friend's youth group because her friend was being baptized.

[22 : 00] It was a special occasion. And they had a fellowship offering. It wasn't cow, sheep or goat. It was pizza. It's a bit more appropriate for teenagers. But they ate together in fellowship as a celebration of Thanksgiving for this person, for God, who worked in this person's life, causing her to make a public declaration before everyone at church.

Or last year, we had a couple celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary and they had a little service here at church on a Saturday with lots of fellowship and food after the service because it was a celebration of Thanksgiving to God for their 60 years.

And so at special occasions like birthdays, weddings, graduations, a birth of a child or grandchild, a new job, a baptism, a confirmation or even like Mother's Day next Sunday.

We're pretty good at gathering together in fellowship and even eating together. But don't forget the Thanksgiving bit. Don't forget to make it a celebration of Thanksgiving to God who has given us this good thing to enjoy.

And so to help us today, we're going to finish in a moment and we've brought some special morning tea. We're going to make it a special occasion. This is just a practice go for next Sunday at Mother's Day, right?

[23 : 22] And so in a moment we're going to close with a prayer of Thanksgiving. We're going to get in the practice of thanking God and then we're going to head straight out and enjoy some morning tea. I forgot there was slices, cakes, donuts, lemmingtons, chocolates, all these things.

Enjoy fellowship together but don't forget the Thanksgiving bit. Why don't you share one thing that you're thankful to God for? Some good thing in life or perhaps some character trait of His like His mercy.

And let's make it a celebration of Thanksgiving to God. And so why don't we stand and say this prayer of Thanksgiving.

They stood for prayer at the coronation last night and so we say together Gracious God we humbly thank you for all your gifts so freely given for life and health and safety for power to work leisure to rest and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life.

Above all we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ for His death and resurrection for the gift of your Spirit and for the hope of sharing in your glory.

[24 : 42] Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let's go and enjoy our fellowship offering.