

# Draw near as God commands...or die

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[ 0 : 00 ] Aaron, the high priest, just remained silent with his sons dead on the ground in front of him that day.

! You kind of think what do you make of that? What do you make of a God who would do that? The point is I would love us to see this morning that our God, the God who reigns and rules today, he is a consuming fire.

He really is. We can draw near to him. Like amazingly, that's why we're a church here this morning. Amazingly, this pure and holy God, he opens a way for people like us to come and know him as our God.

But we must come as he commands on his terms and by his way. And if we don't, we will die and be consumed.

We are right in the thick of Leviticus, this Old Testament book. It's set one and a half thousand years before the coming of Jesus.

[ 1 : 03 ] This is what has happened. In his love, God in history had chosen and called the family of Abraham to be his people. That's the book of Genesis. He'd rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai to himself.

He gave them his law. And then he instructed the people to build for him a tent of meeting and a tabernacle. The picture of which you see on the screen. He said to the people of Israel back then, in this tabernacle, I will dwell in your midst.

I will be with you. That's the book of Exodus. Now, in the first half of Leviticus, the question is, how can this holy God dwell in the middle of people like them?

Like us? Ask the question today, this God in heaven, who is blazingly morally pure and holy, how can he come close to people like us, whose lives are marked by mess and dirty disobedience? How can that happen? And Leviticus says to us that God has made a way. If you've been here these past two Sundays, all of chapters one to seven, there's a lot of it, are detailed instructions spoken by God to Moses, telling them what the people are to do to approach this God safely.

[ 2 : 24 ] And the holy God says, you can draw near to me through sacrifice. Back then, in their day, through sacrificial animals offered, slaughtered, chopped up.

And then the priests spreading their blood around and burning their bodies on the altar. These sacrifices back then, God said, will make atonement for you. They will soothe God's anger. They will cleanse the dirt of your sin. They will pay the debt of your sin. And as a result, you can know God's forgiveness and know his pleasure. God has made a way.

Back then, three and a half thousand years ago, seven chapters in Leviticus have detailed instructions for how the people back then could draw near to God. They were instructions back then, by the way, which we've said point forward so wonderfully to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

By which today we can know God's forgiveness and his pleasure. That's now today. But by the end of Leviticus chapter seven, in this unfolding story, in the book of Leviticus, all that's happened to this point is just instructions given.

[ 3 : 38 ] Do this, do this, do this, do this by the Lord to Moses. The question back then was, will these instructions work? We live in a world full of instructions.

Say that you say that you've got a new ninja air fryer at home like we do. Now the internet is full of instructions. Use these utensils, follow this recipe, do this at this temperature for this amount of time and your stir fry will be out of this world.

But will it? Or say you're struggling in life with relationships or physical health or mental health. You'll find instructions everywhere. Do this, try this, take this, think like this and it will make you

better.

But will it? Will the instructions work? What happened here three and a half thousand years ago? When the sacrificial system got going?

When priests were appointed and sacrifices made and the blood starts flowing? When God said back then, do this if you would draw near to me. Did it work?

[ 4 : 50 ] When today you listen to God's word and follow his instruction, when you come to God as he commands on his terms, in his way, what will happen for you?

Will you actually receive his forgiveness and know the relief and joy of having him as your God? Or would you be better off trying some other way to get to him?

It brings us to Leviticus 8 to 10 then. Not instructions anymore, but action that took place. Big public action three and a half thousand years ago.

Action which says to us so loudly and clearly, you can come, you can come. Draw near to the Holy God as he commands or you will die.

So first off, we must come to him as he commands this God of ours. We must come to God through God appointed priests.

[ 5 : 56 ] And that was chapter 8 that Woody read just a moment ago. And chapter 8 is the big day back then when the priests were set apart for their ministry. We're not going to read the whole chapter, but just see how things start off in chapter 8 verse 1.

The Lord said to Moses, bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sinner offering, the two rams and the basket containing bread made without yeast, and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

And Moses did as the Lord commanded him, and the assembly gathered at the entrance to the tent of meeting. We've not said much yet in this series about the priests.

A priest is a mediator. A priest is someone who bridges the gap between us and God. One verse in the New Testament summarises, Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

A priest is one of us, appointed by God, to represent us to God. The priest bridges the gap.

[ 7 : 13 ] He goes to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for us. Very striking, I think, that so many cultures around the world and down through history have sensed that a priest is needed.

An ancient Greek, Shinto, Hindu, voodoo priests. There is some kind of deep sense within us that as humans we cannot, we dare not try to just bridge the gap on our own to God.

And that is right. It's exactly right. One more little portion from chapter 8. Notice what happens next, verse 5. Moses said to the assembly, This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.

And then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash round him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him.

He fastened the ephod with a decorative waistband which he tied round him. He placed the breastplate on him and put the urim and thumin in the breastplate. And then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred emblem, on the front of it as the Lord commanded Moses.

[ 8 : 28 ] And back in Exodus 28 and 29, God had set out in very precise detail what the priests would wear. How they should be set apart.

How they should conduct their ministry. They looked something like this. And the children here are going to make one with all the exact costume that they were meant to wear.

And Moses says to everyone here, we will do what the Lord has commanded. So he washes these men with water. They've got to be cleaned to come into God's presence.

Then he dresses Aaron, the high priest. The ephod was like an apron. The breastplate had 12 stones, each engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel, placed over the priest's heart.

The turban had a gold plate on it, saying holy to the Lord. All of that God's design, his instructions. And did you notice Moses did it, end of verse 9, as the Lord commanded Moses.

[ 9 : 38 ] In fact, every step of this big day happens the same. In verses 10 to 13, everything is anointed with oil and set apart for God, the tabernacle and Aaron and his sons.

End of verse 13, as the Lord commanded Moses. In verse 14 onwards, a sin offering, a burnt offering, an ordination offering are made, purifying the place, dealing with the priest's sins, setting them apart, making them ready.

And all of it happens, verse 17, verse 21, verse 29, as the Lord commanded Moses. Children sometimes play in England, in English, a fun little game called Simon Says. You ever played that? You've got to do what Simon says. Simon says, touch your nose. Simon says, wriggle your nose. Simon says, open your mouth wide. Touch your ear. Oh no, I'm out. Because Simon didn't say. In Leviticus 8, the Lord says, And Moses does it, all of it. [10:47] And at the end, verse 36, Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord commanded through Moses. It's exactly the same in chapter 9, a week later, as we see these God-authorized priests offering God-authorized sacrifices.

Chapter 9, verses 1 to 6. On the eighth day, Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel, and 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 the grain offering mixed with olive oil. That's a lot of sacrificial offerings. For today, the Lord will appear to you. And the Israelites obeyed. They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and then the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. If you can imagine that. Such a massive, massive moment, three and a half thousand years ago. Can you imagine this?

[12:11] How can people like them, people like us, our lives marked by dirty disobedience, how can we come into the presence of a pure and holy God? Could he ever really come close to us and be our God?

At this point, this moment, the tabernacle's built, the priests are appointed, God's instructions for sacrifices have been given, and now all the people come and they stand before the Lord. And then Moses said, this is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you. And Moses said to Aaron, come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering, your burnt offering, make atonement for yourself and the people. Sacrifice the offering that's for the people and make atonement for them as the Lord has commanded. And so, verse 8, Aaron came and all the people watched. A couple of weeks ago, I watched a film called Das Boot. It was a film about a Second World War German submarine.

[13:24] And as they were near Gibraltar, they were attacked in this submarine and they lost power. And they sunk, a hundred men in an iron boat under the water.

They sunk to the bottom of the sea and hit the bottom and were stuck there. And they panicked. Now, the chief engineer came and said, I think there is one way that we can get out and get up and be alive again.

I think if we mend this, I think if we twist this, I think if we release the air from the ballast and if everyone stands here, we've got one chance. It just may be that the submarine will rise to the surface and we will live.

And so, over hours, all the preparations were made and then everything was set. And desperate men gathered in this iron boat at the bottom of the sea, all eyes on the captain, ready to turn the handle and let the air be.

Will it work? Will we live? And I'd imagine at this point in the history of Israel, all eyes are on Aaron.

[14:35] And as you stood there in the desert in the assembly, with all your mess and muck and sin and shame sticking to you, what will happen? All the instructions have been given.

Can this priest make atonement for me? Can my sins be washed away? Can the Lord appear to me and I not die? And so Aaron, the high priest, doesn't turn the handle. He gets to work.

He slaughters the calf as a sin offering for himself. He spreads the blood. He burns the fat. End of verse 10. As the Lord commanded Moses. He offers a burnt offering for himself, then a sin offering and a burnt offering and a fellowship offering for the people.

There's no deviation. There's no initiative taking. He doesn't say, I think I'd like to approach God in my way. He offers all the sacrifices exactly as God had instructed.

And then, verse 22, Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering, the fellowship offering, he stepped down from the mound on which the altar stood.

[15:50] Now what? Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. Will they die in the presence of God? They did not.

They came out. And they blessed the people. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people on that day. Like when God met Moses on Mount Sinai, possibly the cloud over the tent lit up with flashes of lightning and fire.

From heaven. Whatever it was like, at this moment, the people saw the glory of the Lord who had come near to them. I imagine they trembled.

I imagine others held their breath. For how can we survive in the presence of the living God? And at that very moment, verse 24, fire came out from the presence of the Lord.

The fire was exploding from the tent, maybe blowing aside the curtain. And the fire consumed, not the people, but the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar.

[17:02] What is going on on that day? On that day, three and a half thousand years ago, the people drew near to God exactly and only as he commanded.

Through God authorized priests offering God authorized sacrifices. And the Lord, he appeared to them and fire came out and burnt up the offering. The Lord got approved.

It worked. It worked. Fire from the Lord demonstrating he accepted these sacrifices on their behalf for their forgiveness.

Think, how would you respond to that? My sins dealt with. And the Lord can appear to me and I not die. When all the people saw it, they shouted for joy.

And they fell face down in humble, thankful worship. On that day, draw near to the Lord as he commands and forgiveness and joy will be yours.

[18:12] That's a lot to say in 10, 12 minutes. We say, 21st century Cambridge, so what? So what? All of this for us today.

And what we should know is that the New Testament says so very clearly that all the action of Leviticus is here for us and to teach us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the one sent into the world by his father through whom we can draw near to God. Jesus, who is the ultimate God appointed high priest.

Jesus, who is the once for all God given sacrifice for us. The New Testament letter of Hebrews speaks very clearly and explicitly of Jesus in this way.

In Hebrews 7, 26 and 27 on the screen, such a high priest, Jesus, truly meets our need. One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

[19:25] Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. Because he sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

He is the priest. He sacrificed for their sins. And he is the sacrifice when he offered himself.

And so if you can, with all the complicated details of Leviticus 8 and 9 swirling, would you come in your imagination to the cross?

Come in your imagination to the cross and now see Jesus, our great high priest. He was appointed by God.

He was set apart for this great task. And he obediently stepped forward and did as his father commands. Can you imagine if you were there on that day?

[20:32] As the old spiritual song says. Imagine you were there on that day in the crowd, with all your mess and muck and sin and shame sticking into you.

Can Jesus make atonement for me? Could my sins be washed away? Could I stand accepted in the presence of a pure and holy God?

And then on that day, see Jesus, our high priest, get to work. Offering himself for sins. He allows himself to be crucified.

Bearing our sin and guilt in his body, he is slaughtered. His blood is shed. And he suffers in our place. He gives his life as the God authorised sacrifice for many.

And as Jesus bows his head in death, he cries out from the cross, it is finished. That is, it's done.

It's complete. And at that moment, as he gave up his life, the gospel tells us there was no exploding fire from God like in Leviticus 9.

[21:47] But rather instead, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom to say in part, the way into the presence of God is now open.

It is done. The holy God has made a way to forgive and accept people like us. That we may draw near to God and he be our God forever.

And he has done it through his precious son, the one priest, the one sacrifice given by God whom we need. And when you put your faith in Jesus, when you take him as your saviour, he offered himself for me, how might you respond?

Well, maybe you'll find yourself shouting for joy and falling face down before your God in a life of grateful and humble worship.

Leviticus 8 and 9 points us to the good news gospel of Jesus, to our world today and to us. Do you want to draw near to God?

[ 23 : 08 ] He's made a way. He's made a way. And it works. You can come. You must come as God commands you to through Jesus Christ.

Because there is one God and there is one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for many. Because salvation is found in no one else.

For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. Because I am the way and the truth and the life, says Jesus. And no one comes to the Father except through me.

So as you place your faith in Jesus, you can draw near to the Holy God with absolute confidence through him, through Jesus Christ.

That is the way to come. That is the way you must come or die.

[ 24 : 13 ] And just as we finish off, I think Leviticus 10 verses 1 to 3, it should knock you sideways. Because on the very same day that all of that happened and all the people shout for joy.

Utter horror. What happens? Look, chapter 10 verse 1. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, took their censers and they put fire in them and they added incense and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command.

It's not super clear exactly what they did wrong, I think. Did they use the wrong incense holders? It could be that. Did they take fire from the wrong place?

It might be that. Did they barge too far into the tabernacle trying to take their incense into the most holy place? It could be that. What is very clear though, is that they did something that the Lord had not commanded them.

And so verse 2, as a consequence, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. And they died before the Lord.

[ 25 : 24 ] They had instantly, instantly, from God, on purpose, a bolt of fire which ate them up.

And that is because they would not draw near to God as God commands. I don't know what you make of that. Moses then said to Aaron, whose two eldest sons lay dead at his feet.

This is what the Lord spoke of when he said, among those who approach me, I will be proved holy. In the sight of all people, I will be honoured. And Aaron remained silent.

I think what happened here says to us that in our lives today, we can't mess around with God. You know, he is a holy God of blazing moral purity.

He is a consuming fire. And he will show himself to be holy. He will not be mocked. He will publicly display his glory for all to see.

[ 26 : 30 ] In his deep love, our God has made one way for people like us to draw near to him through Jesus, the final high priest, the one sacrifice on the cross.

You can draw near. You're invited and commanded to draw near through Jesus alone. But try any other way that God has not commanded and you will end up unforgiven and dead.

I'm trying to be a slightly better person won't work. Picking another religion won't work. Hanging around Christians at church won't work.

Attaching yourself to some other so-called priest from another religion won't work. Having faith in Jesus, adding alongside that some other traditional, cultural, religious practices won't work.

Saying, I'll find my own way, thank you, will not work. And thinking, I'm sure God will forgive me, that's his job, won't work. It won't.

[ 27 : 33 ] You know, the day will come when, when all of us will stand before the presence of God on the day of judgment.

And if you've put your faith in Jesus, you will be safe on that day. And then, more than any other day, you will shout for joy. And you will fall on your face before the one who has saved you.

But if on that day, if on that day someone has not put their faith in Jesus as God commands, God will show himself to be holy.

And you will die, unforgiven, forever. So come to the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you are a Christian believer, cling on to the way that God has commanded.

Because Jesus is the only saviour. He is the only priest and the only sacrifice for sins. Every other way will end in death. Cling to him, hold on to him.

[ 28 : 41 ] And you'll be safe and saved for all eternity. I'm going to lead us in a prayer. And then we're going to sing together. Let's pray. Almighty God and Father, thank you that you are the God who has made a way for us to draw near to you.

You are not a God who lies. You're not a God who leads us astray. And you have provided for us one perfect priest who offered one sufficient sacrifice.

We praise and thank you for your son Jesus, consumed on the cross that we might not be. Thank you that the way is open to you.

And through faith in Christ there is fullness of joy for all eternity. Please make us, men and women, all of us here this morning, those who stick with and hold on to Jesus as the way.

Please save us from veering off from him. Or seeking another way to please you. And we pray for our world, for our culture.

[ 30 : 02 ] And ask that over these coming weeks more and more people would hear of the Lord Jesus Christ. And turn to him. And find the salvation that you offer. We ask in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.