

Leviticus 17:10-16 PM

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[0 : 00] Good evening folks, it's so lovely to see you all. My name is Aaron Roberts, I'm the minister that looks after the service if you're brand new. I am not sick, my voice is just a bit croaky, but I'm not sick.

I sung a little bit of karaoke last night. And everybody wants to rule the world by tears for fears. And that was awesome. But I may have ruined my voice slightly.

If you are new, I want to catch you up on some things here. But, so we're in the church calendar in the season of Lent. And so we're doing a special five week sermon series leading up to Easter. We're in week two of that series. And each week we're going to have two readings that we're looking at. Two readings. One from Leviticus and one from Hebrews. So it's a five week series, two readings each week, Leviticus and Hebrews.

The first two weeks, of which we're week two. The first two weeks, we're focusing in on the Leviticus reading. Week three, the middle week, we're going to focus on both readings.

[1 : 09] And the last two weeks, so four and five, we're going to focus in on the Hebrew reading. So it's going to be Leviticus, Leviticus, Leviticus, Hebrews, Hebrews.

Which is, we're not trying to be clever. We're not trying to be tricky. We're hoping that it's helpful to you. We're hoping that this will convey something really important to you.

And here's what we're trying to convey. Is that over thousands of years, God has revealed himself to us progressively.

So, I mean, we know this, right? So when humanity messed up in the garden, God didn't just send Jesus straight away. God has slowly revealed who he is and what he's doing over a massive amount of time.

So that when we read the Old Testament, we read it in light of the New Testament. Because God has revealed more to us.

[2 : 14] So it helps us understand the Old Testament. And when we read the New Testament, we understand it so much better when we know the Old Testament. I hope that all makes sense so far.

So, for example, in the book of Hebrews and the book of Leviticus, they're actually a really great couplet. They work really well studying them together.

Leviticus gives us the background we need to understand Hebrews. And Hebrews is awesome at interpreting Leviticus. So, for example, in Hebrews 9, it says, Without the shedding of blood, there's no forgiveness.

Which sounds so bizarre and weird and culty to us. Unless we read Leviticus, especially chapters 16 and 17, and we have these kind of aha moments.

When we understand what's happening in Leviticus, we understand what Hebrews is talking about. So, with an understanding of all these ancient rules and rituals and practices, we read the New Testament and it makes so much more sense to us.

[3 : 21] Okay, so hold all of that, hold all of that in your brain for a moment. So, as I said, tonight we're looking at Leviticus 17. And I think it's going to be helpful if I give you a bit of an overview of Leviticus.

Because it's a daunting book. It's kind of the book of the Bible where Bible reading plans kind of go to die, I think, sometimes. I have a Bible app that reads the Bible to me in my car on my commute to work.

And right now I'm actually in Leviticus. I get like, this week I've had like five chapters of Leviticus on my way to work every day. And it's a, I mean, it's a vibe.

Like it's something, you know. And I've discovered that the long lobe of the liver is a phrase mentioned a surprising amount of times in Leviticus.

However, if we really dig into it and unpack it, I hope you'll see this is a beautiful book that is grace-filled.

[4 : 33] Okay, there we go. So, before we actually get to Leviticus 17, let me give you like a real big picture of Leviticus. So, Leviticus is set after God's people have escaped slavery in Egypt.

They're camped outside Mount Sinai. This is where God says to them, I want to be your people. And, sorry, I'm going to be your God and you will be my people. And they built a big tabernacle, which is like a big church to gather in.

And that was a place where God said, I will especially dwell here. But the people royally mess up. They start, you know, they start worshipping other idols. So, the big question becomes this.

Well, how can these people be with God? How can they be near God? A God who's holy. How can an unholy people be near a holy God?

To use Bible language. It would be like flying too close to the sun without any protection. That's what Leviticus is about. You read it and it's so strange to us. Because there's stuff in there about like mold on walls and what to do about that.

[5 : 36] And washing stuff. And lots of stuff about scabs on skin. And just strange practices. But here's what's going on. In order for an unholy people to be near a holy God, what Leviticus does is it tells us how God provided a way for that to happen.

God provides a way for an unholy people to be near a holy God. And the way that happens is God initiates three big things.

He initiates a set of rituals. He initiates a priesthood. And a range of purity laws. So rituals, priests, and purity laws.

So one at a time. Really quickly. So the rituals that he initiated, which you'll read a lot about when you read through Leviticus. These are religious practices. They're acts.

They're liturgies. Like we have communion. Like we're having communion tonight. It's kind of like a ritual. Right? And the rituals are amazingly helpful because they do a number of things.

[6 : 43] So some of the rituals are ways of saying, thank you, God. You do this physical thing. Like this physical thing. You grab stuff out of the garden. And you bring it to this place.

And it's like, God, you've provided. Thank you. Some of the rituals are ways of saying sorry to God. And they're really full-on rituals.

They involve animals. They involve animals dying. And it's a very pointy way of reminding the people that sin is very serious. And some of the rituals are like huge parties.

Like banquets. Like feasts. Where the people retell the stories about all the amazing things that God has done for them. Like Passover, for example. So these rituals are super, super helpful.

And God gave the people these rituals as an amazing act of grace. God got them to set up these kind of symbolic structures and practices.

[7 : 39] Not because God needs a whole lot of people to tell him he's really cool and great. But so that an unholy people could be near a holy God. So that an ungrateful people could be reminded of how grateful they should be towards God.

For all the things he's done. So prideful people can have a practice of repentance. So that's rituals. God also instituted a priesthood very, very quickly. They were simply, they represented the people to God.

So when they did their things, it was like they were doing it on behalf of all the people. And they represented God to the people. So rituals, priests, and purity laws. And those are like, don't touch dead things. Don't eat certain animals.

Lots of cultural rules and symbols. That reinforce the idea that we need to be holy and pure. And that we're different from the people that surround us. In order to be in the presence of a holy God. So that's all the strange stuff in Leviticus. It all had an awesome purpose. But I know as you imagine some of the stuff in your head, all these things happening.

[8 : 46] It just still sounds a bit odd probably to some of you. Like I don't know if you remember the, like the Indiana Jones movie, the Temple of Doom. Like where the guy rips out the beating heart. Like the still beating heart. Remember this?

Anyway. Like it feels like, what? It feels like they're describing that kind of scene. It just sounds crazy. But none of the stuff here. None of the stuff described in Leviticus is magic.

It's not magic. And really importantly, it's not people trying to appease God. It's like, oh, if we maybe kill this goat, God would be kind of happy about that. It's not people trying to figure out on their own

how to make God happy by doing kind of spiritual things, rituals.

No, it's the opposite direction. It's God saying, here's how you can be close to me. Here's how you can be near me. Here's what I'm going to do. We're going to set up all these temporary provisions to make that happen.

So you take a whole lot of things really seriously that you're not taking seriously right now. We're going to set up all these practices for you to do that. So that you'll recognize that you actually should be different to the surrounding nations.

[10:00] We're going to set up some temporary provisions for that. I think that's really important that you understand. This is God doing this. So rituals, priesthoods, and purity laws. One last thing about Leviticus.

At the center of the book are two chapters. So this is the whole book. Right in the middle are these two chapters, 16 and 17, about the most important ritual, which is called the Day of Atonement. As an aside, it was this ancient literary practice. Often they would sometimes put the most important thing right in the middle of a book.

So at the center of Leviticus, chapter 16, the Day of Atonement is a very special feast. And Mark's going to talk about that next week.

Tonight we have chapter 17, which helps us understand the Day of Atonement. Which is why we're doing it first. Okay, right then. I hope that was really helpful.

[10:56] That's really big picture stuff. Now let's dive into chapter 17. And it won't actually take very long. It's probably helpful to have your Bibles open, if you'd like to follow along with me.

Page 96 of the Blue Bibles. Chapter 17. Now, we only read the second half of chapter 17.

But if you looked, if you sort of slid your eyes down, you slide your eyes down the whole chapter, there's actually a rhythm to this. There's five scenarios, five situations.

And they have kind of a, each situation has a particular rhythm to it. So, in each scenario, it gives a rule. God gives a rule.

And then he tells you the punishment for breaking that rule. And then there's some additional information. So rule, punishment, and additional information. Five times. So, in verse 3, you see rule 1.

[11:55] It says, if you kill a domestic animal, you have to bring it to the tabernacle. Which is like the big church. Otherwise, if you don't do that, you'll be cut off.

You'll be cut off from God and his people. So what's going on there? Well, the additional information is found in verse 7. It seems like the people were like killing domestic animals, which are the ones used in like days of atonement and stuff.

And there were kind of these unsanctioned sacrifices to crazy gods. And verse 7 describes this.

Verse 7. So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons after whom they whore.

Which is one of the all-time great scriptures in the Bible, I think. That's an awesome line, isn't it? It's like, this is what, so this is what's going on, basically. Doing crazy little, you know, idolatrous things over here.

They go, no, if you kill an animal, you've got to bring it to the temple. We're going to do this properly. We're going to do this right to the right God. Okay, that's rule 1. Rule 2. Basically repeats. We don't need to go into it. Rule 2 is verse 8.

[12:59] Basically repeats that in simpler terms. Rule 3, verse 10. It's simple. If you drink blood, you're cut off. You're expelled from the community. And then the other rules expand on that. Rule 4, verse 13.

What if you're hunting and you kill an animal? It says, well, you should drain the blood. Because it's blood, it says there, is symbolic of its life. And if you don't, you're cut off.

You don't have to bring this animal to the tabernacle. Because it's not one of the kind of ones you use in a tabernacle situation. It's just like a wild animal. But you still have to drain the blood before you eat it.

And then rule 5, verse 15. If you find an animal that's dead. So you haven't hunted it. It's not a domestic animal. You haven't hunted it. You just found a wild animal.

It's dead. You want to eat it. What do you do? Hard to drain its blood. It's been dead. It's already dead a few hours. And the rule there is, as a precaution, technically, because you haven't drained the blood, technically you're kind of unclean for a while.

[14:04] Which is like a Leviticus way of saying you can't go to the temple for a little while. So wash yourself, wash your clothes, and then you're good. And then you're back in. You're on board again. So there you go.

You know, what? So what? What's going on here? I mean, it's so culturally distant from us, I know. Why on earth? I mean, why on earth are we?

Why on earth? What are we doing, Chris? What are we doing here tonight, you know? Why can't we read the cool Jesus stories? Because there's so many.

There's lots of them, right? And they're fantastic. I have a cohort of pastors I meet with. I speak with every couple of weeks. They're guys I went to Regent with, and they're pastors now in different places around the world.

I think I've mentioned them before. And we stay in touch regularly, and we talk about what's happening in our lives. And I said to them, this week I'm preaching Leviticus 17. And they were like, what's wrong with you?

[15:05] And one of them said, why are you doing this to your people? Okay, so what's so important about this that we need to understand it?

And I think more specifically the question is, what's the big deal with blood? What's the big deal with blood? So you drink some blood.

I mean, it just sounds gross, but you drink it like, who cares? And it seems, well, it seems like God really cared about that. But why does God care about this?

So let's talk about blood for a minute. The key to understanding all this, and why we read it tonight, is verse 11. And it says two, it says a couple of really important things here.

Let me remind you of verse 11. For the life of the flesh is in the blood. So it repeats this idea that the life of the animal was symbolized by its blood.

[16:20] This is a symbol that God initiated. God said, I want you, I mean, God can do what he wants. He just says, this represents this, this represents this. And it was helpful to people.

And in this case, God said, the blood of an animal is going to symbolize its life. And it's not too random, though, is it? Because you lose your blood. I mean, obviously you die.

So that's why it kind of makes sense. So the symbol of blood played a really big part in these ancient rituals that God initiated. And the really big rituals, as we said, involved animals.

Animals dying. And their blood, as we heard in the Hebrew scripture, would be sprinkled on things. As a huge graphic reminder that something died so you could be near God.

And why is that important? It's a picture. It's like this picture that says to you, my goodness, sin is very serious, isn't it? Because God chose to take one of his own creatures, one of his own creation, and let it be killed for your sake.

[17:35] A substitute was made for you. Something else is going to pay the price for you. And again, this is God's idea. God made this way. That's why this ritual existed.

So here in Leviticus 17, really simply says this. Don't devalue the symbolic importance of blood. Don't take blood lightly. Don't take it lightly by drinking it.

Don't take it lightly by just letting it spill out onto the ground. It's a precious thing. It represents life. I hope that makes sense. Don't diminish the symbolic importance of blood.

Because God has chosen it as a profound symbol that will mean a lot to the people who utilize it in these practices. So, that's it.

But what are the implications for us? What should we take away from this? Hebrews 9 verse 22 captures it well. Indeed, it says, Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood.

[18:42] Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sins. Again, like I said at the start, it's wonderful to have this Leviticus background. To understand this verse in Hebrews.

Which to our modern ears just sounds just kind of weird. See, Leviticus helps us understand what Jesus did on the cross. See, one of the things that happened back in the days, at the start of a sacrifice, when God said, Take this one bit of my creation and bring it up.

And we're going to kill it. And the meat was eaten. It wasn't wasted, just so you know. Is the priest would lay his hand on the animal's head before its blood was shed.

It was a very meaningful moment. And everyone there, including the priest, recognized. And the priest who were representing the people, recognized that this animal was taking their place.

So, everyone seeing that could be like going, I see. That animal is taking my place. It's dying instead of me.

[19 : 47] So, the sacrificial system taught God's people that God is merciful and he is gracious because he would accept a substitute. God made that way.

You might still think, you know, God demanding a sacrifice seems kind of unfair and a bit weird. Except that, like, I'm sure you know that one of the main ideas behind the sacrificial system was that it pointed us forward to what Christ would do on the cross.

So, it's true. God initiated the sacrificial system. He required the sacrifices. He dictated the format of what they should look like. But then later in Christ, God became that sacrifice.

He became that substitution. So, we could be forgiven. And it is an awesome thing to be forgiven, isn't it? One of the things we do in, or let me say it like this, the parents of my children, I'm not going to say their names, but the parents of my children do a lot of apologizing to their children because they lose their cool a lot.

And it's a wonderful thing to do. It is awful to be in that space where you are unreconciled with somebody, where you have wronged them by shouting at them, treating them unfairly.

[21 : 26] It's horrible to feel that. And I know you all know what this is like, to have a broken relationship with somebody that's unreconciled. And it is infinitely worse when that broken relationship is with our Creator.

But God always makes a way. And that is the story of the Bible. Making a way. God making a way. God making a way. One more thing I'll say here.

Despite that, despite God making a way, I think we prefer, or we like, to come to God on our own terms. You know, like I bring my success to God.

I bring my week of not swearing, or whatever it is that you think is terrible, of not losing my cool, of not losing. No, we bring our good moral decisions to God because we say to ourselves, well, God really likes that stuff.

You know, God, that's why God likes me because I bring this, I'm a great package, to be honest, you know. But we must come to God on His terms.

[22 : 34] And those aren't His terms. His terms are not, bring all the, tell me about all the cool stuff you've done. We must come to God on the terms He has said.

So He set up this whole system back in the days to make that happen. And now we have Christ. We have Christ's death. We have His resurrection. We have Him paying the price for us. We are forgiven. We are loved. We're cherished.

We're counted as righteous because blood was shed. And again, it's not our idea. It was God's. Romans, verse 11. For the life of the flesh is in the blood.

I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls. God in His grace gave us a way to be with Him that has always been His way.

So here in Leviticus, we have these rituals, these purity laws, these priesthoods, and now we have Christ. So let's come to God on His terms, not our terms.

[23 : 32] His terms are, you are forgiven because blood was shed. We can't sidestep those terms.

We can't get around them. And we certainly can't improve them. In the words of Jonathan Edwards, you contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.

So come to God on His terms. His terms are grace. Amen. Amen.