

Leviticus 9:22–10:7 AM

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] Well, here's something I've been looking forward to saying for a very long time. I wonder if you'd open your Bibles to the book of Leviticus, page 88, that was read for us a moment ago.

We begin a series in preparing for Advent, the first Sunday in Lent, and the series is called The Holy God Draws Near.

And we move out of Corinth, which was 2,000 years ago, to the foot of Mount Sinai, which was 3,500 years ago, into the book of Leviticus.

And the series is in Leviticus and in Hebrews, which is the perfect New Testament fulfillment of Leviticus. But the focus of the first three sermons will really be in this book of Leviticus.

And it's a strange book, very remote. Note, it doesn't directly apply to us today. There are hundreds and hundreds of regulations about animal sacrifices and what you should wear and skin diseases and blood and fire and uncleanness and long lobes of the liver and all those sorts of things.

[1 : 1 3] And the question you may be asking, why on earth would we bother even looking at this? I mean, aren't we past all that primitive, uncivilized, ancient history?

How does it help us today? Or more pointedly, why is it even in the Bible? And there are two things to say by way of introduction.

I just want to introduce the whole series. And these two things are to keep in mind as we recognize how God has revealed himself to us. And the first is that God's revelation is progressive.

That there is so much depth and beauty to God, and we are so dull and blind, that God chose not to send Jesus all at once and give us all the final revelation in one hit.

Otherwise, we'd never really understand or appreciate who Jesus is and what he's done for us. So God takes his time. And over thousands of years, he reveals more and more of himself and his ways through the history and through the culture of the people of Israel because we are able to understand things better when we see them and we see the story of how they unfold and the narrative of what God is doing.

[2 : 3 7] And the point of all the rituals in the book of Leviticus and the hundreds and hundreds of instructions is that ritual is a powerful way of expressing and explaining what it means when God says, I am holy.

Sounds like they're having a bit too much fun downstairs, isn't it? We should all go down and stop it. Either that or bring them up and we can have it up here.

So you get what I'm saying. I mean, you can go to a dictionary and look up the word holy and it's not going to get you very far. But it's much better to watch God doing stuff and through the life of the tabernacle and the animals and the blood and the aromas.

So revelation is progressive. And the second thing about the way God has revealed himself is that revelation has a goal. And the goal of God's revelation is the person of Jesus Christ.

He is the full and final manifestation of all the things that God has done until then. He's the full expression, the image of God, the manifestation of God in all God's goodness and holiness and saving power.

[3 : 54] And Jesus himself taught again and again and again that we cannot properly understand the Old Testament apart from him. That all the parts of the Old Testament were God the Father bearing witness to him.

That he is the fulfillment not just of the narratives or the promises but of the law and of the suffering and of the hope and of the faith of the people in the Old Testament.

Which means that as we look at the Old Testament God is furnishing our imagination to more wonderfully and more fully love and worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I don't think that's anywhere more true than the book of Leviticus. Because it's in the book of Leviticus we grasp something of the dimensions of the death of Jesus Christ and the depth of our sin and need.

The enormous cost of his love for us and the lengths that he must go to bring us to himself. So why is Leviticus in the Bible? And three reasons and we will come to chapters 9 and 10 in just a moment.

[5 : 04] Three reasons. Number one, it's because God draws near to his people. So the first 12 books of the Bible are a continuous story of love from God to his people.

How God makes a people for himself in Genesis. And when you come to the end of Genesis there are 70 of them. And then he rescues them from slavery in Egypt and brings them to himself at Sinai and there are 600,000 at the end of the book of Exodus.

And he brings them to Sinai so that he can dwell with them. And everything that happens is God's initiative. Everything is God's movement toward his people.

But when they come to the mountain of God, Mount Sinai God comes down on the mountain but they can't go up to him otherwise they're going to die. And only Moses, they say, Moses, you go up the mountain.

You go and talk to God face to face and Moses goes up but only after offering sacrifice. Sorry, I pointed to you saying, you know what I mean. And on the mountain the Lord gives Moses instructions on the building of a tabernacle.

[6 : 16] Not a random religious relic. The tabernacle is a luxury royal tent. A holy place where the God of all the earth can come and dwell with his people.

And God's great desire since the creation of the world is to dwell with us. To enjoy fellowship and communion with us in both ways. In fact, in chapter 25 he says to Moses, build me a tabernacle so that I can dwell amongst my people.

And the tabernacle is a symbolic copy of God's dwelling place in heaven which is a bit mind-blowing. And that's why it's full of beauty and proportion. There's a seat and a lamp and the presence of God dwells there with his people.

And then we come to the last chapter of the book of Exodus. The tabernacle is built and before anything else happens, do you remember what happens right there at the centre of the camp? The glory of the Lord descends in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire as his glory fills his tabernacle.

And Leviticus, book 3. It's the very next book in the Old Testament. And it is the next step in the story of God's love with his people. Because there is a fundamental impossibility of God dwelling with his people.

[7 : 35] God is holy and we are not. He is more holy than you or I can imagine and we are more sinful than you and I could ever dream.

And Leviticus is the story of how God makes a way to dwell with his people. In other words, so if my first point was God makes a way to dwell with his people, the second point is Leviticus is there so that the holy God can dwell amongst the unholy people.

You know, throughout the Old Testament, the one way that God refers to himself more than any other is by the name holy.

It's the core of who he is. And there are a number of words that are used to translate holy because it's such a rich idea. So the word consecrate means to make holy and the word to sanctify means to set apart to be holy and the sanctuary is the holy place.

Holiness is the same word behind them all. And in the book of Isaiah, you remember the day when Isaiah came into the temple, Isaiah saw the Lord. And God himself is not described, but what he sees is a throne.

[8 : 49] And above the throne, there are these seraphs, burning creatures. And you know what they're singing? They sing this continuous song to the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, and their theme is one.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of his glory. It's interesting, isn't it? They don't start with his mercy and his grace and his love and his kindness because all those things have no meaning apart from his holiness because holiness is the supreme truth that we can say about God.

It is his separateness from creation and from evil. He exists in independence from creation in total, unique, moral purity and majesty.

And do you remember Isaiah's response when he sees God and he hears this hymn? He thinks he's going to die. He sees the holiness of God and the first thing that he becomes aware of is not how happy this power and glory is.

The first thing he is aware of is of the infinite distance between himself and God. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips. And the book of Leviticus is the system that the holy God gives his people to deal with their sin so that his holiness might be a source of life and not a source of death for them.

[10 : 21] So that he can draw near to them and they can draw near to him. And it's difficult to express the hostility there is between holiness and sin.

Next week we're going to look at blood and the importance of that in Leviticus. And the week after we're going to look at atonement. But one of the key parts of the system that God installs is the place of priests.

God chooses a group of people who are to mediate between him and the people of Israel, between the holy God and the sinful people. And they are to maintain the system of sacrifices and the tabernacle and all the holy things and to make atonement for the sins of the people so that God can draw near.

And God chooses Aaron who's Moses' brother as the high priest and his four sons as the key priests in the tabernacle. And they need to be cleansed and they need to be anointed and they need to have sacrifices poured out before they can appear before the Lord.

And Exodus chapter 28 and 29 explains all that needs to happen to them before they appear. And if you're someone who reads these things in the week, have a look at Exodus 28.

[11 : 35] The garments that God describes, the holy garments. Twice he says in that chapter, they are for glory and for beauty and they're gorgeous.

They're purple and blue and scarlet. Not this old black and white stuff you can see in front of you here. And on their shoulders and on their chests they wear precious stones and each of the precious stones is inscribed with the names of the tribes of Israel.

Not as an end in itself. Not as a fashion statement. Let me read to you from Exodus 28. Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate piece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord.

Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly. Isn't that astonishing? On the bottom of his robe there are bells and pomegranates, little golden bells and pomegranates to ring out when he's in the holy place otherwise God says he'll die.

and you don't know that he's going to die because it'll be silent in there. And then in chapter 29 he describes their ordination. They're washed and they're anointed with oil then they put on their priestly garb then there's a sacrifice of a bull and then there's two sheep and they put blood on the earlobe and on the finger and on the toe and they sprinkle on the altar and the ordination goes for seven days and seven nights.

[13 : 13] It's exhausting and traumatic. And at the end of chapter 29 in Exodus God finishes speaking about all the tabernacle he says at the entrance of the tent of the meeting before the Lord that's where I will meet with you and I'll speak with you there.

There I'll meet with the people of Israel and it shall be made holy by my glory and I will make holy the tent of the meeting and the altar. See that? God will do that by his glory and Aaron and his sons I will make holy to serve me as priests I will dwell among the people of Israel I will be their God and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I may dwell among them I am the Lord their God.

That brings us to Leviticus 8 so everything I've said so far is introductory really and here in Leviticus 8 and 9 we get a description of the ordination now I remember my ordination it was incredibly long but it was not seven days and I didn't have to stand at the tent of meeting for seven days and seven nights and have blood over me every morning and every evening and finally the day comes in chapter 9 where God says in verse 7 this is the day that I am going to appear to you O Israel and they get themselves ready and years ago my mother came to visit from Australia to stay with us and she is of an age where we needed to get out all the old silver and polish it up because we knew that she would be pleased to see it and Roman and I would have got away with it as well except one of the boys said why are we using these knives and forks we've never seen them before but this is different this is life and death so in verse 8 of chapter 9 all the congregation draws near to the tent of meeting the tabernacle and the priests offer burnt offerings to atone for their sins and prepare for the glory of God to appear and we read in verse 23 of chapter 9 and Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting and when they came out and blessed the people the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar and when all the people saw it they shouted and fell on their faces

I bet they did this is the supernatural fire of God it's approval it's underwriting the blessing that Aaron has just spoken and it's a huge moment for the people of God in the Old Testament it's the visible sign that God accepts not only the place of the tabernacle for his dwelling but he's accepted the sacrifices and now he has begun to bring his holiness to dwell amongst his people and they shout out with joy and fear and they fall on their faces as the absolutely right full bodily response to the holiness of God in worship because all the rituals of the Old Testament have this one aim so that the holy God might draw near and dwell with his sinful people the priests gorgeous garments all the sacrifices they're not an end in themselves they are to help us and to help the people of God come to terms with holiness they are protocols by which we approach the divine king in the Old

Testament and unless God was willing to condescend and draw near the rituals would do nothing there's nothing automatic about them the rituals do not ensure God's presence they're given by God and they show his great desire to be close to those he love and then we step into chapter 10 on the very first day that Aaron is high priest there is this terrible event this tragic event the two eldest sons of Aaron highly privileged young men back in the book of Exodus in chapter 24 they had been included with Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel when God had invited them up on the mountain to eat a meal with him they had been there they had heard the voice of God they had gone through this eight day consecration and ordination process they had joined the sacrifices and the prayers they had seen the fire of God come out and consume the sacrifices but on this day the first day in direct defiance of what God says they take their own fire they take their own fire pans and they offer unauthorized fire before the

[18:16] Lord and fire comes out from before the Lord and consumes them and we read that they die and we're not told why they do this did they want some glory for themselves I mean did they think that because they were related to the high priest they could ignore what God said did they think that they could decide what was holy and approach God on their own terms we don't know but Moses does explain what's just happened in verse 3 of chapter 10 if you look down at that Moses said to Aaron this is what the Lord has said among those who are near me particularly the priests I will be sanctified I will be treated as holy and before all the people I will be glorified and Aaron held his peace it's a visceral and visual reminder that it is a fatal mistake to treat the holiness of God with contempt you cannot decide what is holy

I can't decide what is holy only God can we cannot draw near to God on our own terms but the terms that he sets and I know that's very upsetting to west coast attitudes of life but the holiness of God is something heartbreakingly beautiful and magnetic because it is so pure the problem is sin sin in us sin in our attitudes and in our actions it's the whole reason why God gave the sacrifices and the priesthood at the beginning and it is a powerful reminder to us today again that we have to come to God on the terms that he says we have to turn from our sin and not to presume to approach God on any other term except his promises of grace and mercy and forgiveness and that leads us to the third reason why Leviticus is in the Bible and that is it points to a better high priest one who is holy and innocent and unstained and separate from sinners because even though God took great care to give his people the system to approach him

Leviticus is a powerful reminder of the human failure and sin to obey is better than sacrifice we need a better high priest than Aaron we need a better person than Moses and Nadab and Abihu failed as did Aaron I mean by this stage he'd already offered the golden calf and Moses himself failed he didn't make it to the promised land and when God explains to Moses in the book of Numbers why he doesn't make it he says you didn't believe in me to uphold me as holy before the eyes of the people of Israel the story of the Old Testament is the story of a one sided love where God keeps drawing close to his people to save them and keep them and they keep defying him and turning away to other gods and God sends his prophets and God sends his leaders to turn back to him and sometimes they do turn back for a while but it's pretty grim since the beginning of

COVID we've begun a daily morning prayer service online on Zoom and there are some faithful people still meeting there and we've read through the whole Old Testament a couple of times I gotta say it's pretty grim read it through it's just like us it's grim it's marked by great darkness and hardness and sliding and contempt for the holiness of God and the more you read the Old Testament the more you long for a high priest who will come who is completely without sin who can do something permanent about our sin who can actually make us holy and that is the point of Hebrews and the Hebrews passages we have Hebrew tells us about a son who comes from heaven who travels the infinite distance between us and God and brings glory and grace full of grace and truth and perfectly meets our needs so if you turn over to Hebrews 7 for a moment

I'll finish with these two verses I think it was page 1004 wasn't it yes 1005 let me read verse 26 it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest holy innocent unstained separate from sinners exalted above the heavens he doesn't have any need like those other high priests to offer sacrifices daily first for his own sins and then for those of other people since he himself once for all had done this by offering up himself this is Jesus our high priest tempted as we are without sin holy innocent unstained and the verse before it says since he lives forever since he has an eternal life he is able to save us utterly look at verse 24

[23 : 49] Jesus holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he ever lives to make intercession for them uttermost the salvation that Jesus brings us is forever and entirely that is why we are able to draw near him now without fear or anxiety knowing he will never let us go and the invitation to us today at the beginning this first Sunday in Lent is to draw near to God through Jesus Christ in confidence and drawing near means going out in your heart to him extending yourself out of your heart toward him to draw close to God since in Jesus Christ he has drawn close to us Amen you strong you and