

Wholehearted Worship

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[0 : 00] Not many would know what happened in London on the 20th of May 2003. It turned out to be the date that marked the beginning of the end of the Anglican Church as a worldwide family of churches.

What happened on that date was the announcement of the appointment of Canon Geoffrey John as the new Bishop of Reading in the Diocese of Oxford. The problem was not that Geoffrey John was same-sex attracted, but that he had a male partner of 27 years and was an outspoken critic of the church's position on homosexuality.

And in the heated debates which followed, one Anglican minister went on national radio to explain the position of historical Orthodox Christianity and called the church to submit to the authority of God's Word.

He quoted a number of passages in Leviticus as part of his plea. He received an email in response to that radio program, and part of the email said, It was wonderful to hear you on the radio this morning voicing your concerns about the incompatible views of homosexuality.

Thank you for doing so much to educate people on God's law and the importance of taking our moral lead from the Bible. So far, I've been a faithful disciple of the Bible's views and try to spread the word to as many people as I possibly can.

[1 : 31] When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I remind them that Leviticus 18.22 clearly states it's an abomination. End of debate.

I do not need... I do, however, need some advice in regard to some of the specific laws and how to follow them. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, according to Leviticus 11, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality.

I don't agree. Where do you fit on the selfish versus gay debate? Leviticus 21.20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have defects in my sight.

I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20.20? Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including their hair around their temples, even though that's expressly forbidden in Leviticus 19.27.

Does this mean that all boy bands should be stoned? My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19.19 by planting two crops in the same field.

[2 : 39] Leviticus 11.6-8 by touching the skin of a dead pig, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread. I mean, they're toast, aren't they?

He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary to go to the trouble of getting the whole town together in order to stone them? Leviticus 24. Could we just not burn them at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws, according to Leviticus 20?

I know you've studied these things extensively, so I'm confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging. Plenty of sarcasm there.

And yet, it raises some real questions. Is this book of Leviticus for a bygone era? Are its laws, its regulations, its views abhorrent to our culture?

Well, they are. We exist in a culture that believes in the sovereign self, self-authorizing morality, where every individual chooses for themselves what's right and wrong.

[3 : 56] Leviticus seems as unworkable as windows in a submarine. And that culture of self-authorizing morality infiltrates within the church, where even we gather today, sit, and we pick the bits that we think are more important than the others.

On the other hand, we might be sitting in the church here, and we hold a high view of the Bible and its authority as the word of God, but still kind of unsure how this book of Leviticus fits.

Our instinct is that it's got something to offer, but not really sure what it offers. Why should we read Leviticus? Why spend six weeks on it? I wanted to spend ten, we've got it reduced to six.

Why should we read Leviticus? Is it a little more than just a harsh duty for us to endure over the next number of weeks?

It seems a total distance from the stories of Jesus and the adventures of the apostles. Apart from a couple of chapters that we'll look at next week, there's no stories, there's no drama, there's no movement.

[5 : 10] It feels like 27 chapters of lectures about rules, rules, rituals, regulations. And so my hope is that in the next six weeks, that if you love life in God, in the Lord Jesus, through the Lord Jesus, that is, if you treasure Jesus, then you will come to love Leviticus.

I'm convinced that we should love this strange world of Leviticus because of how it foreshadows Christ and what life in him looks like.

You know, questions like, why did Jesus see himself as sacrifice, an offering for sin? What's all this stuff about blood of Christ in the communion, the Lord's Supper that we participate in?

What about when we read about Jesus being the Lamb of God? You know, the New Testament letter of Hebrews is full of allusions to priests, to blood, to a tabernacle, to atonement, and none of those things make sense by themselves.

And that's why I don't think we can leave Leviticus untouched in our Bibles. This is God's prototype for life in him, a life of purity and holiness.

[6 : 26] This is God's word to all of his creatures which crosses across the generations. So what I want you to do now is grab your Bible, turn to Leviticus, dust it off, because we're going to spend the next six weeks there and I need you to go there right now.

Let's go. Leviticus, grab your Bibles. There's spare ones floating around. We're a church that says one of our core values is Christ-centered Bible saturation. This is the authority word of God and so we want it in front of you.

If you haven't got one, put your hand up and it'll come to you right now. There we go. Put your hand up. Especially if you're a community group leader. Put your hand up. Leviticus chapter 1, verse 1. This is God's word. It says, That's the opening of Leviticus. And that phrase features 56 times in Leviticus.

All scripture is inspired by God. It's all God speaking to humanity. But we should be significantly encouraged that Leviticus records more explicit, exact words of God than any other book in the Bible.

[7 : 48] If there was a red letter edition of the Old Testament where God spoke, we would see red all the way through Leviticus.

When you pick up Leviticus, you are picking up one of the most authoritative manuals on the principles of holy living there is. This book is foundational.

It is as foundational as Genesis and Exodus which came before it. Leviticus is good news. It's good news for sinners who seek pardon, for priests who need empowering, for women who are vulnerable, for the unclean who covet cleansing, for the poor who yearn for freedom, for the marginalized who seek dignity, for animals that demand protection, for families that require strengthening, for communities that want fortifying, for creation that stands in need of care.

And these issues and many more of them are what we're going to see in Leviticus. So, how does it fit in the Bible? Leviticus is the third of the first five books of the Bible.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Collectively together, they're called the Pentateuch, five books. And Leviticus is right in the center. It's the center book. And there is a particular order in the opening of these foundational books.

[9 : 08] They give us the basic ABC of theological understanding. They are foundational books for the whole of the Christian faith as we know it today. Genesis presents the human race as ruined because of rejection of God, the source and the sustainer of their life and all life.

Exodus opens with the whole plan of redemption and salvation and rescue as God chooses and brings his people out of ruin and captivity and slavery to be his own redeemed people living with him in a binding covenant relationship made through Moses.

And then we move on to Leviticus and we see how those same saved people are now expected but also set free and able to live in purity in response to God's rescue plan.

You see, the book's rich descriptions of sacrifices and moral holiness and ritual purity provided God's people with a gripping vision of this new life in God, with God, at one with God. The center of the book of Leviticus is chapter 16. It's a chapter about the day of atonement. And atonement is not a word that we use much nowadays, but to understand it in its simplest form, atonement means at one-ment with God.

[10:44] At one-ment with God, together with God. And Genesis presents us with a ruined race. Exodus introduces us to a redeemed people. Leviticus develops the theme of a holy nation, a people different because of God's rescue and his salvation plan.

A ruined race, a redeemed people, a holy people. Leviticus, if you like, is like the blueprints of a building. Once the building is finished, its blueprints are no longer needed, but they still give a bunch of useful information of understanding the finished product.

And when we see these blueprints of atonement, of life in God, we actually start to explore the riches of what Christ himself came to fulfill. Only when we learn that from Genesis that we are a ruined and a lost people, we're ready to engage the topic of salvation in Exodus.

And only when we have taken the wonders of God's covenant, unreserved, undeserved love and mercy and grace in the rescue story of Exodus, can we be ready for the theme of holy living as our right and our willing and our joyful response to God's love as taught in Leviticus.

So what's it about? Leviticus, the center book of the Pentateuch, takes place during a course of one month, beginning to end, the course of one month at the foot of Mount Sinai.

[12:19] The first and the last verse of Leviticus pretty much tell us what the book contains. Verse 1, the very beginning, we read, The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

And as you flip to the very last verse, we read these are the commands that the Lord gave to Moses at Mount Sinai for the Israelites. So basically, having rescued his people, brought them out from Sinai, God speaks to his people, he lays out for them a long series of commands that governs their new life in him.

It's an authoritative manual on the principles of holy living. There is a word that dominates the first seven chapters. By my count, it appears 142 times in itself.

It's the word offering. The words offering, sacrifice, oblation together, which carry all the same kind of ideas. Those words collectively occur 194 times in the first seven chapters.

That is the great theme of the first seven chapters, offering. Chapters 8 to 10 introduces to the priesthood.

[13:35] Chapters 11 to 16 are marked out by the words clean and unclean. Phrases that occur 164 times in those seven chapters. The chapters that follow on from chapter 17 onwards, the end, are noted by their contrast.

Sorry, their constant use of the words holy, consecrated, sanctify. Holiness, separated from, different to, is the closing theme.

They're the four big themes running through Leviticus. Offering, priest, purity, holiness. You see, the book of Leviticus is not telling ruined people how to be redeemed, because Exodus did that.

Leviticus is addressing people who are already redeemed by his mercy as his people. It's not telling them how to be brought close to God, but how to walk close to him in a life of purity and holiness that they've been brought into.

The very first verse of Leviticus, we're introduced to this thing called the tent of meeting. And that makes no sense unless you've read Exodus. In Exodus 25 to 40, we have the construction of the tent of meeting.

[14:55] And it takes up a big chunk of Exodus. And what's interesting is that the tent of meeting is meant to symbolize what the human race lost.

The Garden of Eden. Paradise. In the instructions, it sets out as seven words of creation. Just like in Genesis chapter 1.

And if you pay attention to what the people were meant to be building, it has so many similarities to the Garden of Eden. It has a lampstand that has fruit hanging from it.

A botanical lampstand that resembles the tree of life. And like the Garden of Eden, the tent of meeting can only be entered from the east. And all the precious stones that were in the Garden of Eden were now embedded in the robes of the priest.

And just like the Garden of Eden that had the cherubim, standing guard at the entrance of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been expelled from because of sin. And if they tried to get

back, the cherubim meant to cut them in half.

[15:59] No access back to the Garden of Eden. We have in the tent of meeting these great curtains where cherubim are woven into the fabric to remind the people there is no access to this place.

They are not allowed to just walk back in to God's presence. It's a reminder you've been cut off from God.

And it's fitting that when you get to the book of Exodus in chapter 40, we see Moses standing outside the tent of meeting.

He's not allowed in. It's a symbol of paradise lost. Chapter 40, verse 34. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

God is there. His presence is there in the tent of meeting. And Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. God's presence is in the tent and Moses standing outside, not able to enter, just as Adam was outside the Garden of Eden and not able to enter.

[17:13] And it makes the beginning of Leviticus so, so striking. Verse 2. God speaking to Moses, How's that going to happen?

How is it possible for someone to approach the Lord? We've been cut off. How can fallen man approach God and regain paradise? That's what Leviticus 1 to 7 is all about.

Now, the word offering dominates the first seven chapters, as I said 194 times. And these chapters tell us how it's possible for a fallen person to relate to God.

How can we have at-one-ment with God? They describe how God can find a fallen person's presence pleasurable to him in a way that he used to find Adam's presence.

The term is a fragrant smell. How can God go to people and go, oh, that's good.

[18:32] Rather than walking past a double hook. How's that possible? Two things need to be done. First thing is to bring, verse 3 and 5, a bull without defect.

Now, I grew up on a farm, and we had cattle on that farm. Now, most farmers, surprisingly for city people, is that they do not call their cows things like Daisy and Buttercup.

It just generally doesn't happen. They do, however, name their bulls. Bulls like Cream Puff, Perfect Storm, Hammer, Unforgiven, you know, oof, kind of names.

Except Cream Puff is here. Anyway. On our farm, our bull was called Jason. Yeah.

Jason. I don't know why. No idea whatsoever.

[19:43] However, at the beginning of Leviticus, let's call this bull wholehearted. Wholehearted. If the offering is a burnt offering for the herd, you are to offer a male without defect.

You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord.

The term without defect is the same term that's used of Noah early in the Bible.

He was a man who was blameless, literally, without defect. He was a man who was completely devoted to his relationship with God.

God said, Moses, Noah, build a really, really, really, really big boat. It's going to take you a hundred and something years. Right on. In the desert.

Makes no sense. You told me to do it, God. I will do it. It's the same call that God had of Abraham in Genesis 17. I am the Lord Almighty.

[20:45] Walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Without defect. I think these men show us, help us to understand the symbolic meaning of this offering.

To bring a bull without defect is to bring a bull wholeheartedly. A bull that symbolizes the life that God finds pleasing. That is, bring your best.

That's the first requirement. The second requirement is that you bring your all. Not just your best, but your all. Verse 4. You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.

The words are quite strong. It's not just a, you know, touch the ball. It's a pressing down on its head. It's the same words that's used of Samson in the Old Testament.

Remember when he grabbed the pillars and pulled them in? It's the same word. A force associated with it. This bull symbolizes. This bull is my identification.

[21:49] It symbolizes me. It symbolizes my life. It symbolizes my commitment. You are to offer this symbol of what you are to be to make atonement for your life before God so that God accepts you in the way that he wants to accept Adam.

Wow. That's good. I find this person pleasurable. And then we read in verse 5. You are to slaughter the young bull before the Lord and then Aaron's sons of priests shall bring the blood and splash it against the sides of the altar to the entrance of the town of meeting.

You are to skim the burnt offering and to cut it up into pieces and the sons of Aaron the priests are to put fire on the altar and arrange the wood on the fire. Then Aaron's sons of the priests shall arrange the pieces including the head and the fat and the wood that is burning on the altar.

You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water. And the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It's a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

You see, the bull called wholehearted became what it symbolized. The bull was a symbol of what God requires from his people. God requires that we give ourselves totally to him, completely to him.

[23 : 06] Worship of God always requires total commitment. It always requires total surrender. We cannot escape this fundamental feature of authentic worship.

Total commitment. As the starting point is reflected in the arrangement of the five sacrifices that are called for in Leviticus 1-7.

The five sacrifices can be classified into their motivation and their necessity. The first three sacrifices are voluntary.

The burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering. That's chapters 1-3. And the final two are required. The sin offering and the guilt offering in chapters 4 and 5.

The first offering reflects the willing spirit of the worshippers to acknowledge the lordship of their God. And since the burnt offering was totally burnt up in the altar, the person themselves did not benefit from it.

[24 : 10] There was no personal gain from this. It's an expression of complete surrender to the lord. An act of total devotion.

There's no holding back. There's no stingy, you know, wheeling out of favors or passing out of favors. I'll have that bit and you have that bit. You know, burn up the chuck steak and I'll take the eye fillets.

It was a costly sacrifice. Bring your best and bring it all. You see, worship begins with a devoted heart towards God. A wholehearted devotion to him.

On your own accord, you part with your possessions and disregard personal ambition. The first divine word then from the tent was a call for complete surrender, complete submission to the lord who accepted nothing less than that from those who loved him.

And yet as you go, it doesn't take long in fact in the Old Testament, before you get to things like Isaiah 1 where God says that I have no pleasure in your sacrifices.

[25 : 20] Books like Amos. Your sacrifices are repulsive to me. They stink. I have no regard for them.

You see, the Israelites soon forgot about the real meaning of the sacrifice. It became instead a ritual disconnected from relationship with God.

The people didn't live lives in conformity to their offerings. They offered this bull. It was burned up. And then they went and lived for themselves. The sacrifices no longer represented their lives.

The good news is that God's plans and his expectations for the sacrificial system didn't fail. The writer to the Hebrews says that the offerings ultimately foreshadowed the real and the ultimate thing.

In Hebrews 10, we see the symbolism of the burnt offering again. It becomes the real thing in Jesus. It's perfected in Jesus. It says, There you go.

[26 : 31] There's all of Leviticus chapters 1 to 7. You were not pleased. And then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, O God.

See, the expectations that underlie this burnt offering that call Israel to give themselves wholeheartedly find their fulfillment in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Here I am. I've come to do your will. He takes on a body. He identifies with us. He lives like the burnt offering so that verse 8, first he said, Sacrifice and offerings, burnt offerings.

And sin offerings you do not desire, nor were you pleased with him, though they were offered in accordance with the law. They did what they were told. And then he said, Here I am.

I've come to do your will. He sets aside the first in order to establish the second. He gets rid of all this need for burnt offerings because he's completely fulfilled the will of God.

[27 : 38] And by that will, you have made holy. You have made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

It's done. It's done. That's why we don't need to play cleaners at St. Paul's every day. To clean up the blood and the guts. It's done. We don't need to offer burnt offerings and sin offerings. Jesus is our offering.

As the Son of God, He humbled Himself. He became one of His creatures. He identified with us. The broken, the sinful. He was wholehearted in His devotion to the Father. He lived the fallest life in obedience to His Father. And He died a voluntary death. As a voluntary sacrifice.

[28 : 39] He became our ransom, our atonement. And the Apostle Paul sees the death of Jesus through the lens of the burnt offering. In Ephesians 5.2, he writes, Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I'm delighted. In Jesus, we are brought back to God, given free access to Him. God is pleased with you and me on the basis of Jesus' wholeheartedness and His holiness.

Through Jesus, God delights in us. If you're in Christ, you are holy. You are right.

And I delight in you. We are as much His loved children on the basis... Sorry, we are His much loved children on the basis of His perfect Son's wholeheartedness.

And that is the wonder of the Christian faith. The verdict of acceptance comes before the performance. Exodus comes before Leviticus. The rescue comes before the requirement to live out who we are.

[29 : 56] The burnt offering captures in dramatic form what Jesus called for when He invites us to love God with every part of our being. He's fulfilled the requirement so that we are set free to live as Jesus lived.

And again, Paul, through the lens of the burnt offering, calls to the Roman church and to us generations later in the church worldwide, in view of God's mercy to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

He wants us to live like the Lord Jesus. He wants us to live like the Lord Jesus. He wants us to live like the Lord Jesus. He wants us to live like the Lord Jesus. The call is for us to be an aroma acceptable to God.

And God is pleased with a life of total devotion. And so as you begin this series, can you genuinely say, as the Apostle Peter said in Mark chapter 10, see, Jesus, we have left everything and followed you.

Let me just pull out one point of application here. It's not the only application of Romans 12.

Romans 12 is everything. But I find it interesting that when the Philippian church sent its monetary support to Paul in prison, he characterized their monetary support, their sacrifice, with the same language that's used of Jesus' sacrifice, which is the same language which is used in Leviticus 1 to 7.

[31 : 46] In chapter 4 of Philippians, he said, it was a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

When God saw you support me financially, he went, that smells good.

When we present our financial gifts to the Lord as an act of worship, we are offering up ourselves. The Bible views such gifts as an indication of our commitment to our Savior.

I mean, I've said it so many times before. What we do with our money is an indication of what we truly value, what we truly serve, what we truly sacrifice. What we sacrifice to is what we truly serve. And it's an indication of whether I've got wholehearted devotion to Christ or whether you can have some of my life, I'll keep the rest. That was the problem of Israel in the Old Testament.

[32 : 53] Giving, including all forms of giving, not just money that you give, giving of ourselves, is not incidental to Christian living, but it's a core value in the life of a devoted disciple of Christ.

There is no legitimate claim to worship God if there is no costly consecration to God.

We'll see that unpacked in the coming weeks. We'll see you next time. We'll see you next time.