

May 10 & 11, 2025

## Shaped and Shattered | *The Call*

Leviticus 1:1, Mark 8:34-35

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The first words in the book of Leviticus are “And God called...”. It’s an interesting way to start a book but when we understand who God calls, how God calls and how God continues to call God’s people in to mission we see how important responding to God’s call is for the world.

Two phones... that was the extent of the technological communication devices in our home. A family of 10... two phones. Actually, it was only one phone because one of the phones was in my parent’s room and that phone was off limits. So... one phone... family of 10. Just let that sink in for a moment... However, when we got a phone call there two competing feelings. One was excitement because someone called us and maybe it was for me... maybe... The other feeling was worry as the phone call maybe wasn’t for me but about me... maybe a teacher or some other responsible adult was calling to inform my parents of any misbehavior I may have been engaged in. But those moments that my mom (she was the only one who answered the phone) let me know the call was for me I would rush to the phone with great anticipation for the conversation to follow.

Times have certainly changed.

Almost everyone has a phone or easy access to one and we don’t even need to answer it anyone. Just in my lifetime I have been able to mark the progression of communication –from phone calls, to emails, AOL, to text messages, to myspace, Facebook, to twitter, to Instagram, to snap chats, to... you name it, human beings continue to try find new ways to communicate.

The amazing thing is that God has been trying to do the same thing as well. Over the next several weeks we are going to spending time reflecting on how God has been trying to communicate with us so we are going to back to our origins, in particular our faith origins, way back, back in the beginning and in

particular we will be settling into one of the least read books in the bible Leviticus.

And to start we are going to re-title this book which will help us bring this book a bit closer of our hearts. Actually, we are going to revert to its original title. It was the ancient practice of the Israelites to call the books of the Torah, the first 5 books of what we call the Old Testament (also not a helpful name) by their first words. We call them Genesis – Exodus – Leviticus – Numbers and Deuteronomy.

- Here is Genesis - בְּרֵאשִׁית which is pronounced: Bereshit – “In the Beginning”
- Here is Exodus - שְׁמוֹת which is pronounced: Shemot – “The names”
- Here is Numbers - בְּמִדְבָּר which is pronounced: Bemidbar – “In the desert”
- Here is Deuteronomy - דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים which is pronounced: Devarim – “Words”

And finally, the one we skipped, the third book of the torah:

- Here is Leviticus - וַיִּקְרָא which is pronounced: Vayikra “And he called”

So, to really know the book that we call Leviticus we should know it by its ancient name Vayikra – “*And He – God, called...*” and that will make all the difference... and we’ll get to why in a minute.

So how did this book come to be called Leviticus? It has to do with early translations from Hebrew to Greek (Septuagint) and then to Latin (Vulgate). This is why your antennae should start to buzz a bit when folks throw around terms like infallible or without error when talking about truth in relationship with the bible. Sometimes things actually get lost in translation.

The first 5 books of the Hebrew bible were put in written form around 600 BCE. Then the Greeks came along and as Greek was a common language, they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek around 200 BCE. By the time we get to the Latin translation in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the name Greek translation Levitikon (meaning relating to the Levites) which was the Hebrew priestly class, is

picked up by our Latin translators and the name becomes Leviticus and then our English translators (King James Bible) stay with Leviticus.

What you title something is very important, and this change dramatically limits the scope and purpose of Vayikra. It limits the scope of this amazing book and one of the reasons why we don't spend much time in Leviticus. The Vayikra, the call, gets limited and small, focused around a certain group of people which was never its larger intention.

But it's called Leviticus... so let's deal with it for a moment... Who were the Levites? Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah... Levi was the great grandson of Abraham, and became Levi became the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were not landowners like the other tribes, but they were tasked with specific religious and cultural duties.

They were supported by the other tribes. Many priests were called into ordination from the tribe of Levi. And yes... in the book of Leviticus there are many, many instructions for the priests on how to order religious life for the Israelites, but as we will discover in a couple of weeks, God calls the entire nation of Israel to be "priestly kingdom".

For far too long our Christian imaginations have been limited by the thought that Leviticus is just for an outdated priestly sacrificial system. And yes, our modern sensibilities can be turned off by all the blood, guts, fire and what feels like deeply personal instructions about things we don't talk about in our homes much less in our churches.

But we are not asking humanity that existed 3500 years ago to understand space flight or the internet or molecular biology, so let's not hold them to our standard. Part of our modern revulsion has given us a false impression of what this book is all about.

So... this book is not about Levites – but is about Vayikra – a calling, and not a calling for just a few special people, but a calling for a whole nation, a calling that extends to us, as inheritors of the promise.

Here are some Vayikra's in this book we call Leviticus.

- Vayikra – and God calls to us to tell us how to love our neighbor.
- Vayikra – and God calls us to celebrate our joy and fellowship.
- Vayikra – and God calls to us to make sure the least among us are cared for.
- Vayikra – and God calls to us about how to treat refugees.
- Vayikra – and God calls us to make amends with one another.
- Vayikra – and God calls us to live each day with intentionality and purpose
- Vayikra – and God calls us to come near to God who deeply loves us, who wants healing and wholeness in our relationships with the world and with God.

So, as we begin this worship series let us take some time to reflect on our own calling. God is calling each of us, in our lives, no matter who we are or our circumstances. Jesus puts it this way.

<sup>34</sup> *He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* <sup>35</sup> *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*  
*Mark 8:34-35*

Now there is a ton to unpack here, and we will do that in our podcast, however the one piece of this text I want to focus on is that Jesus is asking you to take up your cross. Jesus isn't asking you to take up Jesus' cross or your neighbor's cross. Your cross. And your cross may or may not be similar to someone else's but first and foremost it is yours. It's your call. And here is where we are going to start.