

May 24 & 25, 2025

For the Joy

Leviticus 1:4

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This week we continue learning about the laws in Leviticus and the joy that we receive by being in God's closeness, God's presence. The first section of Leviticus is about offerings. The different types and what they are for. They seem to portray this detailistic, strict order of doing things being ordered by God which seems to sound like it's used to appease God. But I think there is more going on in this text than God creating laws for people just to make God a happy God.

You see God is a powerful God, a holy God. Because of that God's very being cannot be fully shared outright with God's people. So, a tent is built as a place where people could come before God and live in close proximity to that holiness. In order to do that, we have instructions, laws that help give us knowledge about how to approach God. God wants nothing more than to dwell with humanity, a way forward to a repaired relationship between Heaven and Earth, atoning sacrifices meant to communicate grace not punishment. While the laws governing Israel's sacrificial system can be some of the most challenging parts of the Bible to read, they're an integral part of the unfolding story of the Bible. Some of the instructions in the laws aren't in place because the scenario is bad, but rather there needs to be steps taking from doing something and then going before God. When these guidelines are placed on the people on what they need to do to enter the tabernacle, we seem them as clean vs unclean or pure vs impure especially when bringing forth an offering. But it's really more about ready vs not ready. What all this might come down to is a species imbalance.

With this imbalance, there needs to be boundaries in place so that the people of God are able to live in the close presence of God. Think about it with rules that seem like a given. (Slide 1) You wouldn't think that someone would put their hand in a garbage disposal, but I'm sure that warning is there to make sure it doesn't happen, but also because it most likely happened to someone at some point. Now, a garbage disposal isn't necessarily bad, it does a useful thing, but when you approach it in an incorrect way, bad things can happen.

(Slide 2) Or a caution sign in an ice rink. Of course there would be ice in an ice rink, but without precautions you may slip. (Slide 3) A playground that has a ton of rules, which I'm sure are there because someone broke them and paid the consequence for it. (Slide 4) Or a more hit it on the nose sign, peanuts contain peanuts! All of these things aren't bad, but when you don't take proper precautions sometimes not so good things happen. This is a helpful way to think about God, especially with God's close proximity and wanting to draw near with this tent of meeting. The tabernacle is the place where God has chosen to reside, where God is right in the midst of the people trying to be accessible, trying to be in an intimate relationship with God's own people.

If you have attended my bible study in the last few weeks, we condensed Leviticus into three weeks and the first week, we talked about these laws and guidelines for offerings brought before God. I showed a clip from the Enter the bible podcast, where God was described as a power plant. (Slide 5) A power plant is well powerful, it's this incredible resource, it's useful, it's not inherently bad. But if you just walk into the center of the power plant all willy nilly, what happens?.....Something bad. So, you have to take proper precautions, (Slide 6) put on protective gear, and all that stuff before entering the power plant. Not because the power plant is bad, but because its powerfulness is its very nature. So, it is in the best interest for us to follow the guidelines to enter power plant so that we are safe.

The book of Leviticus is all about God and humanity dwelling together, and here we find the terms Israel must abide by to play host to God. For the first time since the garden of Eden, God is preparing to dwell in physical proximity to humans in the tabernacle. It's far more limited than the garden—the space itself is limited, and Israel's means of engaging God are limited too. However, Israel doesn't see those limitations as a bad thing; getting to host God is cause for celebration. God is the power plant and we are the workers following guidelines in order to enter the tabernacle, in order to be in closeness to the most holy. We do this not because God is bad or because God wants to hurt us, but because God's nature is very powerful, and so God gives us this gift of warning so we can be kept safe when we draw near to God. So, we take the proper precautions when bringing our offering to God. There are 5 different types of

offerings and each serves a purpose, but the offering of atonement is the one we are going to focus on. Our sins endanger us and our proximity to the God who is the source of all life. Atonement repairs the relationship, so we can stay in proximity to God—real life is being in communion with God.

So once we enter the tabernacle (Slide 7) with a burnt offering. The animal is blameless and represents us and dies on our behalf so that we can be in a right relationship with God. This ritual is giving back to God what God has given us. Offering death isn't necessarily because you are bad or sinful, because the offering is blameless but it is to be closer to God. This is what people do when God shows up to dwell in their midst. Which God's presence is good and dangerous. The world has estranged us from God, so surrendering the life of a blameless soul to draw nearer to God.

However, the killing of an animal is death to one's self but the blood is the life source. When the life of the worshipper is identified with the animal sacrifice through the laying on of hands before taking the life. When the blood is spilled and offered up on the altar, it is offering up of one's life. Through surrendering your life to God, you can enter the tent to be one with God.

Through this process of atonement, they become closer to God than any other time. When you break down the word atonement you get (Slide 8), At-one-ment. It is the moment that we are at one with the divine, holy God. The Hebrew word for atonement, Kippur, however, has two meanings (Slide 9), the first to repay a debt and the second to purify. It becomes this time of repairing the relationships of 2 who are at odds with each other but can now become one. Because of humans being able to be in a right relationship, be able to have a brief moment of the garden of Eden, joy explodes from this moment. The overwhelming feeling of joy when you are able to get a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

Now, we don't enter a tabernacle and sacrifice an animal to be able to be in close proximity with God, but this ancient ritual is one that is told through Jesus.

The offerings show us that the ethics we find in Jesus' teachings were not new when he arrived on the scene—God's earliest guidelines for God's people had everything to do with loving God and loving your neighbor.

This same thing is represented in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The story symbolically captured in these offerings animates Jesus' story which is that of laying down his life as a blameless representative and re-entering God's presence, so all humanity might have the chance to enter Eden too.

Even though we don't have this ritual that draws us closer to God, we still are able to experience the joy (Slide 10 and keep on through paragraph) of the closeness of a loving God. We experience that through loving and serving our neighbors. Through worshipping God and through prayer. When we see amazing things happening in the world to care for others, we experience the joy of the kingdom. We are witnessing a God who chose to dwell in our midst and is constantly working on us and the world so that we can experience Eden.