

Sacrifice

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It is so lovely to have you with us this morning. Let me encourage you to grab a Bible and come with me to the third book of the Bible called Leviticus.

So as we kind of saw a few moments ago, we're starting an overview series of this book of the Bible. And it's designed really to help us see its central message and pull out its timeless truths. So we're going to get going this morning on chapters one to seven. So maybe you want to have those chapters open in front of you. We're going to be dipping in and out, as you can understand, given the amount of text we're trying to get through.

But I hope this hangs together and is just really helpful for us. So to get us going this morning, I want you to think about the famous lyrics to the famous song that Frank Sinatra released in 1955 or 56.

I think it was. It was called Love and Marriage. Remember the lyrics? Got them in your head? Love and marriage. Love and marriage, they go together like a horse and carriage.

[1 : 1 2] Right? You know the song? It's kind of the go-to place when it comes to talking about things that just go together. You know the kind of thing I mean? Two things that go together.

So here's what I want you to do. A little mental exercise to get you thinking. Ten seconds on the YouTube chat. What first pops into your mind when you think about two things that naturally go together?

What are those two things? So, if you're a Brit, maybe you thought about fish and chips.

There's a great Dream Team duo for you. Fish and chips. Maybe you thought about salt and vinegar kind of flowing off the back of that. Or maybe you watch a lot of telly. You thought about DFS and sail.

Kind of always go together those two things. That sail kind of never ends, does it? Or maybe you're a 60s and 70s music fan. Maybe you thought of Sonny and Cher before my time.

[2 : 1 3] But you can have that one. Or if you're a 90s child like me, maybe it was Mario and Luigi came to your mind. Or the evergreen duo of Ant and Dec.

Or if you're Scottish watching this, maybe the two things that go together are Scottish sport and glorious failure. Friends, nobody does it better.

Okay. Two things that go together. Here's what we need to see as we get into this book of Leviticus. This book introduces us to two things that most definitely do not go together.

So get Sonny and Cher out of your mind and replace it with the image of water and oil. Okay.

Two things that just cannot go together. So in this book of Leviticus, what are the two things that cannot go together? We have a holy God.

[3 : 1 6] Holy God, right? Majestic in his perfection. Radiant in his purity. Unchanging in his nature.

We have a holy God on the one hand. And we have sin. Okay. Just two things that cannot go together.

Now, let me try and help us see this in the kind of flow of the Bible story. If you jump back a book of the Bible, think about the book of Exodus, right? We finish the book of Exodus with a bit of a conundrum.

Because on the one hand, throughout the book of Exodus, God has made it clear that he has rescued his people from their Egyptian captors for an express purpose.

Okay. Each time Moses goes to Pharaoh, what is that four-word refrain? God says, let my people go.

[4 : 2 3] Okay. Let my people go. Song made so popular by, I think it was, was it Louis Armstrong that sang that? Let my people go. But the thing is, people often forget the very next line of what Moses says.

So God says, let my people go. And it's followed by another four words, that they may worship me. Okay.

That they may worship me. And this idea kind of snowballs through the book. And you could argue it snowballs through the entire Bible as well. Because later on in Exodus, as God tells his people how to build the tabernacle, which is this portable temple that they are to carry with them through the wilderness on their way to the promised land.

That God may dwell with them. That's how they know that their God is with them. This is what God has said. He wants to dwell with them. So on the one hand, you've got God laying out his gracious and his good intention to live amongst his people.

But on the other hand, the book of Exodus, if you go right to the end, it finishes with Moses not able to enter the place where God dwells.

[5 : 39] Because this God is too glorious. And here's the point. If you're into the Lord of the Rings, let me quote Boromir to you, if you know the line.

One does not just simply walk into Mordor. In a sense, it's the same here. Friends, because of our sin, our rebellion against our creator, one does not just simply waltz into the presence of a blazingly holy God.

A sinful human being cannot just stumble casually into his presence and think that they can live to tell the tale. Now, why? Because the two do not go together.

So how do you solve this Exodus conundrum? How do you square the circle of God's desire and yet our sin problem against our creator, against the Lord?

Well, here's the thing. See, while the people are at the bottom of Mount Sinai making a golden calf, God is up the top of the mountain with Moses telling them how he has made a way for this to happen.

[6 : 59] Right? And right there, that tells us huge things about who this God is. The God of the Bible. What is he like? That he would make a way for this to happen. Does that not tell us that he is a gracious, that he is a merciful, that he is a loving and a compassionate God who really does want to be God with us?

God says this is how it's going to happen. Friends, Leviticus points us to the answer. And the key word for us to see this morning is this word sacrifice.

Right? It's the word that hangs over the theme. It's the theme of chapters one to seven. Okay? And we get five of them laid out for us here.

I'm going to quickly have a look at these together. We don't have time at all to go into any of the details. Instead, we're going to try and get to the heart of what their purpose was.

Now, remember our Waitrose toy shop. Okay? Remember that. What is the Lord teaching his people? So we can kind of roughly divide these five sacrifices, I think, into two groups.

[8 : 11] And these two groups are going to be our two headings today because these two groups tell us two wonderful truths about this God. Here's the first truth. You ready for this? The first truth about this God is that he is a God who invites us to know forgiveness.

He invites us to know forgiveness. That's what three of the five sacrifices are to do with. So we've got the burnt offering in chapter one. We've got the guilt offering in chapter four.

And we've got the sin offering in chapter five. And each of them give us a different aspect of forgiveness. Now, look at chapter one with me, the portion of scripture that we read there.

Here's the burnt offering of chapter one. Dive in with me at verse three. Now, what can people bring as a sacrifice? Well, depending on who you are and what you have, this is kind of what you see developed through chapter one.

You can bring a bull. Okay? You can bring a sheep or a goat. Or you can bring a turtle dove or pigeon. Now, do you see how God has almost means tested this?

[9 : 25] So money and possessions, what you have, what you can afford to bring, this is no barrier to them knowing the joy of them having their sins forgiven.

Do you see how God has provided? So people would bring their sacrifice to the tent of meeting.

They would kill it themselves. And the priest would sprinkle its blood on the altar, which you have to say is a pretty gory ordeal, is it not?

Not too uncommon in this age in which we're looking at here, but this is a gory ordeal. I mean, if this was on the telly, it would most certainly be on after the watershed.

But why is God asking them to do this? Well, I think here is the point, the principle, that for a life to be spared, a life must be given.

Now, notice with me, chapter 1, verse 4, that they are commanded to put their hands on the animal's head. Do you see that? Put their hands on the animal's head.

[10 : 33] As the people symbolically declare that this animal is taking my place. See it? It's the bull instead of me. It's the sheep instead of me.

It's the pigeon instead of me. I deserve death, but another's going to die in my place, and I'm going to go free. I know forgiveness. I know life. The animal here is a substitute. Right?

We're familiar with that word in our day today. Right? If you're a sports fan or whatnot, do you know what made me think about the word substitute this week? About how we used to get Tesco home delivery. Ever had that experience where they come and they give you a list and the guy says, good news, there's only one substitute this week.

Okay? And it's something like we put in cherry tomatoes instead of plum tomatoes or something like that. There's only one substitute this week. We took something that had to come off the list and something's gone on in its place. Yeah?

The word substitute. The animal here is a substitute. And notice what the substitute sacrifice does. Verse 4.

[11 : 38] It makes atonement. Now, that's one of the key words, not just in the book of Leviticus. It's one of the key words in the whole Bible story.

It literally means at one make. At one make. In other words, because of this sacrifice, God's right anger, his wrath against sin has been satisfied.

And you can know that you are right with him. It seems to be the big lesson of the burnt offering, that for you to be right with this God, atonement needs to happen.

And its effect, if you want to come again to verse 9, is that the sacrifice becomes a pleasing aroma in the sight of the Lord.

In other words, it works. It works. You kind of see a similar thing with the sin offering at chapter 4.

[12 : 46] Right? Chapter 4. When do you need to bring this sacrifice? Chapter 4, verse 2. And again at verse 13. And again at verse 27. When do you need to bring this?

Well, when you find yourself having sinned unintentionally. Unintentionally. Right? When you've done something accidentally. Or when you've admitted to do something. And chapter 5, verses 1 to 4.

When you find yourself having sinned intentionally. And who needs to bring the sacrifice here? I think this is fascinating. Who needs to bring it? Do you see how it's all stratas of Israel society? So it's the whole gang, if you like. The elders, verse 15. The rulers, verse 22. And the ordinary people, verse 27. In other words, what they need to see is that all sin is serious in God's sight. And that all people are caught up in this. And that sin is all more encompassing in this God's sight than I think we often think it is.

[13 : 55] Do you find yourself doing that? I find it all the time. We tend to think of sin almost like a grading system. Okay? In our fridge at home, we've got a star chart.

For the kids, the rules are really simple. You behave well. You gain a star. You do something naughty. You lose a star. And it always ends up with this debate.

Was what I did really, was what I did wrong really worthy of losing a star? And you start to grade behavior based on how we think about things.

And it's kind of, Dad, is it really a red card offense? Right? Is it a really red card or is it a yellow card offense? Can I go to VAR on this one? Friends, we try and do that with our sin.

Don't we try and grade it like that? Is what we've done or what we've not done, is it worthy of losing a star? I mean, gossiping behind someone's back?

[14 : 53] Yeah, okay. But it's not murder. My anger problem that exists in my heart that comes out at home and nobody sees it? Yeah, it's not stealing.

Friends, this is what author Jerry Bridges calls respectable sins. Take it we need to learn from this that sin is way more all-encompassing in the sight of this holy God than we ever tend to stop and think about.

But I want us to see here the call from this God to come to him in honest confession and know the joy of sins forgiven.

Right? There's a story told about a church in England who, back in 2013, they received a package in the post. Right? So they opened the package and it's an old Bible from way back in the day. Nothing there with it. And they do a bit of digging to find out what is going on with this. Turns out it was from a man who had 42 years earlier stolen that Bible from the church.

[15:58] And he never thought to give it back. And all of a sudden, it kind of came to a climax that it haunted him all those years. He couldn't live with it anymore.

And he sent it back. Friends, here's a call from God to come and know the joy of sins forgiven. And here's a call from this God to come and come clean with him and to know that he has provided a way for you to be right with him and to live in that and to know life.

And the good news, I take it here, is that God has made a way for forgiveness to be available for everyone. There's no one excluded here. This is for everyone. And thirdly, we get the guilt offering. Do you see that in chapter 5? Think here's a sin offering for when you realize that you have done wrong, particularly when it concerns others, right? So when you've wronged your neighbor in some kind of way, when you've lied or cheated, here's a way that you can make good with them.

[17:08] You see, again, that word, chapter 6 and verse 7. Offer the sacrifice. You know that atonement will be made and forgiveness will be given.

So there's three sacrifices that tell us this key truth, okay? The burnt offering here, the sin offering, and the guilt offering. What do they tell us? They tell us that this is a God who longs for us to come to him and to know forgiveness.

And the remaining two sacrifices, the grain offering, which is at chapter 2, and the peace offering, which is at chapter 3, they tell us that this is a God who invites us to come and show gratitude. Okay, so you've got the grain offering here. So the people are invited to bring, verse 1 of chapter 2, choice flower, right? Verse 1 of chapter 2, follow with me, choice flower.

In other words, they're invited to bring their best. Why? What's the point in this one? What's going on? Well, I take it they're invited to bring their best purely as a way of showing their love for the Lord.

[18:22] After all, he is the one who has rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He is the one who has provided grain for them in the first place.

He is the one who's provided all these cattle for them to bring. And most importantly of all, he is the one who has made a way for them to have their sins forgiven.

And so here's the lesson that the Lord's mercy is supposed to flood their hearts and lead to thankfulness.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you for who you are. And so the people are invited here to come and just show their love for this God.

Thank you, Father. Thank you. And you see, notice verse 2, that this is a pleasing aroma in the sight of the Lord. And similarly with the peace offering in chapter 3, and we're going through this at a hair's pace.

[19:23] I realize this, but stay with me, okay? The similarly the peace offering at chapter 3. Peace there just arrived from that Hebrew word shalom. Right? We know it takes place after the burnt offering.

So the people would bring an animal, it would be killed, and the fat would be offered as an offering. You see, we hate fat in our culture. Hate it. It's always the bit of the meat, isn't it, that goes in the bin.

You've cooked a stir fry, you find some fat. Ugh, that's going out. Don't want that in my system. But these people in this day really simply, the fat is the best bit.

It's the best bit. So here is an offering where people celebrated that they were right with this God. They celebrated it. It's a cause for great joy.

And we learn from chapter 7 that the rest would be shared in a fellowship meal with the priest and the fellow sinners. And so throughout the Bible story, these are times of great joy, of great unity, and of great celebration.

[20:28] As together you celebrate the fact that atonement has been made, has made a way for you to have communion with this God. So friends, five sacrifices.

Two truths. Here is a God who invites us to come and know forgiveness. And here is a God who invites us to come and just show our gratitude.

And you might say, well, that's all well and good. But what does that have to do with me? Well, let's move from the purpose of the sacrifices to see their fulfillment.

Right, now there's a phrase. Let's just stop for a minute. We've been running fast here. We should pause for a minute. And let me just take you to the first of fourth. There's a phrase that people in Scotland use all the time.

And it's the phrase, painting the fourth bridge. Have you ever used that before? I've heard that tons of times before. And it's this phrase that we use to talk about a never ending task.

[21 : 40] Right, just never ending task. And I take it, if you think about it, it originates from the time that the people first painted that bridge. So you can imagine there is on the screen that the one end of the bridge with their can of red paint.

And they'd slowly, slowly, slowly start going all the way to the other side of the bridge until they make it to the other side. But the problem was by the time they got to the other side, the side that they'd started at was in need of a repaint.

So they'd go back to the start and they'd start again. And they'd paint from the side that they started at all the way to the other side. Except when they got to the other side, the problem was that the side that they started at needed repainted.

And over and over and over this process went. Can you imagine the feeling of desperation if you were a painter working on that bridge? This is never going to end.

Here we are again. Here we go again. I imagine that's a thought that must have crept into the minds of your everyday Israelite. Imagine it.

[22 : 43] There you are at the gates of the tabernacle again. Bull in hand. Ready to do your thing. Knowing life well enough.

And knowing your own heart well enough. To know that in no time at all you'll be back. And you'll be saying in your heart of hearts, here we go again.

Well friends, remember our waitress toy shop. Getting kids ready for the real thing. You see, this is what the, of Leviticus as the toy shop.

Here is what the writer to the Hebrews tells us about the real thing. Okay. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

Again and again. Do you hear that language? Fourth Bridge. He offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. And otherwise it was never about this. It was about where this was pointing.

[23 : 44] But when this priest, and he was talking about Jesus. When this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins.

He sat down at the right hand of God. And since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

So friends, do you see that Jesus is, this is the whole argument to the book of Hebrews. Jesus is everything that the Levitical sacrificial system pointed to.

This has all been about him. And what he would do at the cross. It's why the New Testament makes such a big deal of Jesus' sinlessness. His perfection. He's the perfect sacrifice.

It's why the New Testament makes such a big deal of Jesus' death being an atoning one for sin. It's why in the Gospels the writers are so explicit in telling us about the darkness that fell over the land when Jesus hung on the cross.

[24 : 57] Symbolizing God's judgment against sin. So friends, we do not need to offer a daily sacrifice for our sins.

Praise God that the perfect sacrifice, Jesus made it on our behalf on the cross. Remember the idea of substitute? Him for me.

Him for me. Him for me. He died. I live. He took the death penalty that I deserved. I get his life.

He was right with God. He died. I was wrong with God because of my sin. There's been a great exchange. I am right with God. And you see what's driving all of this, friends?

Remember back in Exodus. What's driving all of this? It's God's desire to dwell with his people. His longing to be God with us. And he's going to make a way for that to happen.

[25 : 56] And he's done it through the cross of Jesus Christ. It's fulfilled in him. It's all about him.

We're not thankful for that. If you this morning don't know the joy of sins forgiven, the joy of life with Christ, then come to the cross and know forgiveness.

It's incredible what's going on here with God. The lengths that God would go to rescue us, to save us. Because I'm right there with the people at the bottom of Mount Sinai making that golden calf. That's me. And yet this God sent his son to die in my place. And what about showing gratitude, right? Is that one done away with as well?

Well, here's what we need to see. We don't need to bring a grain offering anymore. But the principle still wonderfully stands. Okay.

We started by thinking about two things that don't go together. Remember that? Two things that don't go together. A blazingly holy God and sin.

[26 : 59] Right? We thought about that. Let me just finish with two things that the New Testament tells us do go together. Okay. Here's what Paul writes in Romans chapter 12.

And see if you recognize where he is getting his language from. See if you pick this up. Okay. He writes this. Romans chapter 12. Having expounded 11 chapters of wonderful gospel truth.

He writes this. Therefore, I urge you, his readers. I urge you, Christian. Brothers and sisters. In view of God's mercy.

To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. Holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship.

Now, do you recognize the principle? Do you see where he's got this from? What are the two things that go together? Mercy and worship.

[28 : 03] Mercy. Knowing what our God has done for us. Knowing who he is. Friends, it should lead us to worship him. And to not just offer a day of the week to the Lord.

Or X amount of hours of a week to the Lord. Policy. And throw yourself on there. That paradoxical phrase. A living sacrifice. Throw yourself on there. Offer yourself to him in light of who he is. Your time. Your time. Your money. Your energies. Your job. Your family. Everything you do. View it as an act of worship. In view of the mercy of your God.

You can call him Father. You can know his love. You can know his care. Mercy. Worship. Mercy. Mercy. Worship. You know, there's a famous story told.

And with this, we'll close. Of pig and chicken standing in a field. Right? Best buds standing there looking out. It's a lovely night in the field. And a bus passes them by.

[29 : 05] And on the side of the bus, it just reads. Sorry. There's a picture of eggs and bacon. And underneath it reads, eggs and bacon. The great British breakfast. And chicken turns to pig and says, pig, look.

We're famous. We're going to be famous. Can you believe it? And pig turns to chicken. And he says, that's easy for you to see. You only need to make a little contribution.

I have to give my whole life. And that's exactly what Paul is saying here, isn't it? Mercy. Worship. Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice.

You know those lyrics that Isaac Watts penned all those years ago? Where every realm of nature mine. My gift was still far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine. Demands my soul. My life. My all. Let's pray together.

[30 : 09] Our Heavenly Father, thank you so much, Lord, for who you are. A God of blazing holiness. With whom there is no shadow due to change.

And yet you are a God through Christ who bids us to come and know you. And know the joy of sins forgiven. And knows the joy of life eternal. And life with you.

Lord, I pray for those watching this here today. Perhaps who might not know Jesus as their King and their Saviour. Maybe they've wandered over the years away from him. Lord, this morning through your Spirit at work.

Would you remind them, Lord, woo them back to the cross. Lord, will your mercy and your love fully displayed in the person of your Son.

And Lord, I pray for us who do know you. Lord, help us never to lose the wonder of your mercy. And help us to respond with lives that are all out in worship of who you are.

[31 : 14] So, Father, thank you for our time together this morning. And we thank you that you do hear us. Because we pray in Jesus' precious and in his worthy name.

Amen.