

Priest

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Date: 07 March 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to have you with us. Let me encourage you to grab a Bible and come with me to Leviticus chapters 8 to 10. That's where we're going to be this morning as we're back in this series, taking a kind of overview approach to this book.

And while you're turning there, let me just kind of remind you that we are a church that loves its 316s. Okay, we love John 316. For God to love the world, that he gave his one and only son, that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.

It's a very heartbeat of who we are as the Lord's people. We love that 316 and we love another one. Okay, we love 2 Timothy 316.

All scripture is God breathed, even the bits that we find difficult to understand. And that's the kind of conviction that's been driving this series, that all of scripture, all of the Bible is breathed out by God. So just like it's good to go to the gym and work in maybe parts of your body that you wouldn't actually go towards, because if you work out the same parts, it's going to be a kind of very lopsided body that you have.

[1 : 09] Just like you would do that, so it's good to go towards the parts of our Bible that we wouldn't naturally go towards. And it's great to hear, last week as we started this series, how people have been both encouraged and stretched as we've dived into this book of Leviticus.

So we're at chapters 8 to 10 today. Wonderful chapters. I really hope that, again, this encourages us and stretches us. But to get us going today, I wonder if you've ever seen a sign like this. Okay? No entry. You'd usually see it hanging in the entrance of a place where you are not allowed to go into. So let me just give you a wee example of this.

I remember when I was at school, one of the most exciting things that ever happened in our little area where we lived just north of Glasgow was that Rangers Football Club decided to build their training ground not too far from where we lived, right?

This was a dream for a football-crazy teenager. And what we used to do during the summer holidays is some mates and I used to go down to the training ground and we'd spend the afternoons there peering through the fence, looking at some of the best players in Europe at the time do their thing, right?

[2 : 25] So they're doing their set plays, they're honing their skills, they're tuning their technique. And then once they'd finished training, we used to sprint round to the entrance and we used to watch them drive out in their fancy cars.

And they always used to come out of these big electric gates. And we used to stand there and watch this, right? The gates swing open.

Out drives an expensive car, right? We might get a wave. Car speeds off and then the electric gates slam shut. And as they'd slam shut, you'd be presented with this sign on the outside that just said no entry, underneath no unauthorised personnel.

And then you'd see the guy who was the bouncer on the door, the security guy, looking at you as if to say, not in a month of Sundays are you getting inside. So we were standing outside this training ground, looking in, realising that we would never have the credentials to ever get inside.

No entry. Right? You ever had an experience like that? Friends, as we tap into the Bible story today, this is kind of, at this point in the story, this is humanity's predicament.

[3 : 43] Okay, and it has been ever since Genesis 3. God creates the world and he creates human beings. And here we have Adam and Eve and their creator God in the garden, and all is well.

There is glorious harmony between creator and creature. But because Adam and Eve sinned, because they ate from the fruit, from the forbidden tree, sin entered the human heart and they are thrown out of the garden of Eden.

And God has to do that. He has to do that. That is who he is. Remember what we saw last week? Sin and a holy God cannot coexist. They are thrown out of the garden, but it is bigger than that. Okay, they are thrown out of the presence of God. And God places at the entrance to the garden, cherubim, right, angels, and a flaming sword to guard it.

So at this point in the story, Genesis 3, the entrance to Eden, hangs a sign that says, no entry. And that is where the story should have ended.

[4 : 52] But because the God of the Bible is gracious and good, he outlines his plan to make a way for humanity to re-enter and enjoy his presence. Okay, what's fascinating, the second half of the book of Exodus, as you read about the construction and the instructions of the tabernacle, this portable temple that Israel carry with them as they journey to the promised land and is in the middle of them as they stop and camp, is that deliberately carved into its design are echoes of Eden.

Okay, so there's light imagery there. There's tree of life imagery. There's gold and precious stone imagery. And particularly in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred bit where God dwells, there's two cherubim on the top of the ark.

See what's going on? Echoes of Eden. And while that is terrific news on one level, there still remains a sin problem.

And because of that, the no entry sign to God's presence still well and truly hangs. No entry. No unauthorized personnel.

So the people need somebody who's qualified and set apart and chosen to come and take them into God's presence. That's what chapters 8 to 10 are all about.

[6 : 24] Okay, step forward. The priests. The priests. They are, if you want to think of it like this, they are the go-betweens. The mediators.

The go-betweens. Yeah. I heard somebody recount recently how apparently at the height of the troubles in Northern Ireland back in the day, so tense was it in the lead up to the Good Friday agreement that Jerry Adams and David Trimble, who were kind of the figureheads of both sides of this, they wouldn't even be in the same room together.

Okay, and so there they were, the government headquarters on different floors. And Senator George Mitchell, who was the kind of peace negotiator between the two, what he was doing was running up and down the stairs between the two parties, passing on messages, trying to broker a deal.

And he was doing this so often that people joked that he was the fittest man in Northern Ireland at the time because he was the runner. He was the go-between. Maybe that's a helpful way to get your head around the role of the priests here.

Right? They are the go-betweens between the people and God. Okay? In the time that we have, we could do so much here. I just want us to do two things. Okay? I want us to see two things about the priests from chapters 8 to 10.

[7 : 40] Two things. Okay? Here's the first thing, that a priest can't just be anybody. Right? It can't just be anyone. God must choose the priest.

Right? And who does God pick? Come with me to chapter 8 and verse 1. Who does God pick? He picks Aaron. Now right there, that is not an insignificant detail.

We should be hugely encouraged that that is the case because in the context, remember last week, Aaron, Aaron, has had an absolute shocker.

He's had a howler. He's had a shocker. Moses, his brother, is up the mountain. Meanwhile, Aaron is at the bottom doing nothing as the people are building the golden calf.

Right? And he comes down. What does he do? This calf just kind of jumped out of the fire. That's his excuse. Just horrendous leadership. Yet like Peter in the Gospels, the grace and the plans of this God are bigger than our failures.

[8 : 47] They are more glorious than our mess. This God specializes in creating trophies of his grace and using them in his plans.

Okay? Maybe some of us need to bathe ourselves in the truth of that today. Okay, do you remember? I forgot it.

Maybe some of us need to bathe ourselves in the truth of that today. God picks Aaron and his sons for this special role. And you see how we get a description of what he's to wear from verse 7.

Chapter 8, sash and a robe around him.

He's got a breast piece. He's got a turban on his head. You get more instructions on this. The middle chapters of Exodus. This is kingly language.

This is what he's to wear. This is what the priests are to wear. And I take it all of this is to help Israel visibly see that Aaron and his sons are being set apart for this role.

[9 : 47] That you would see them as you walked about in everyday life. There's the priests. That's what they do. You recognize them. And verse 14, sacrifices made for Aaron's sins so that they can be atoned for.

Right? So this guy might be set apart. These guys might be set apart. But they're still human. Still sinful. And they need to be made fit for coming near God's presence.

Okay? It's common, isn't it, when you go around to people's houses for them to expect for you to take off your shoes. Think about it like this. Okay? It's what you do. People don't want you traipsing mud all the way into the house, especially if you've got nice cream carpets, right?

That's a disaster. And I was always saying that's the reason why people have welcome mats, not just welcome signs, but at the entrance to their homes. Really, the welcome mats should just say, don't bring your dirt in here.

People don't want you traipsing mud, dirt into their homes. Well, how much more is that the case as we consider the place where God lives? If you're going to be near God's presence, if you're going to come close, you must be spotlessly clean of sin.

[11 : 05] That's the instruction to the priests here. As a friend of mine pointed out, and I think this is really helpful imagery, if it's not dealt with, it's like running into a fire covered in paraffin.

That's the effect of sin in a holy God. You cannot just wander in. You cannot just waltz your way in. Sin needs to be atoned for. And after the consecration service in front of all Israel, we get this at verse 30.

Okay, so he, that's Moses, consecrated Aaron and his garments and his sons and their garments. So in other words, we're good to rock and roll at this stage. Good to rock and roll.

Okay, a priest can't just be anybody. And secondly, a priest can't just do anything. Okay, God gives them two jobs to do.

There's two sides of the priest coin, if you want to think about it like this. On the one side, the priest represents the people to God. So we get this in chapter 9.

[12 : 08] You'll see it begins verse 1 on the eighth day. So we're at the start of a new week. And as if they say, here is the first shot at this new setup.

Verse 3, the people are invited to bring their sacrifices to the entrance. And the priest will play their part in sprinkling the blood of the sacrifices so that atonement for the people's sin can be made.

So do you see it? See, the priest represents the people to God. And the other side of the coin, the priest represents God to the people. See the promise of verse 6.

Because of the atoning sacrifice, because atonement has been made, God's glory will appear to the people. So God is going to come and dwell with his people. This is a huge moment. A huge moment.

And verse 8, Aaron goes for it. Has a shot. Okay, look at verse 22 and 23 of chapter 9. This is key. This is key. We're going to read this together.

[13 : 13] Verse 22 and 23 of chapter 9. Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them and having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down.

Question, is this going to work? Is it going to work? Has this worked? Verse 23, Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. And when they came out, they blessed the people and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

Do you see it? It worked. It's working. Because of the priest's work, God is present with his people. They represent God to the people.

Kind of another aspect to that, if you want, verse 11 of chapter 10. Apologies, we're jumping about a bit, but I think this is worth seeing. Verse 11 of chapter 10, they teach the people God's word as well.

It's another part of the representation role. They help the people understand who this God is, what he's like, what he's done. He's got a teaching role as well.

[14 : 17] So see the two sides of the priest's coin. A priest can't just do anything. They represent the people to God and they represent God to the people. And God has given them a precise job

description and an exact way to carry it out.

And I think that's how we're to understand the events of chapter 10. Whenever God has given them a precise job to do, a precise way to do it, chapter 10, because these two priests, Nadab and Abihu, they just blatantly ignore what God has said about the job.

Verse 1, chapter 10, tells us that they offered unauthorized fire. And we're not given too much more about what else they did, but the very fact that the word unauthorized is used is showing us that they're doing things in a casual and a complacent way.

Isn't it wonderful that God is dwelling with us? Let's go in and have a bit of fun. Okay? Remember what we said. It's complacent, casual. It's like the paraffin of their sins still on them and they walk into God's fire, holy presence.

Okay? It's almost as if at this key moment in salvation history, God reminds the entire nation that yes, he might be near, but he's still holy.

[15:39] He's still holy. Okay? Verse 1 of chapter 16, this is what they've done. They've just ran into his presence. And you don't do that. You've got to do it exactly how God said.

Right? Priests can't be sloppy. You know, I've started reading the Narnia books with Chloe, our oldest daughter. So, we haven't got to number two in the series yet, but I'm looking forward to meeting Aslan with her.

Okay? What is it? The conversation, the famous conversation between Lucy and Mr. Beaver about Aslan. Safe, said Mr. Beaver. Who said anything about safe?

Of course he isn't safe, but he is good. He is the king, I tell you. Here is the go-between.

Here is the role of the priest, the go-between. But as celebratory as this scene might be, and we've got to understand that this is a huge moment here. This is a huge moment.

[16:39] There are still two problems. Right? The priests, they've sinned themselves. That's still a huge problem. And number two, the priests will die.

It's a huge problem. Well, remember, we saw last week, we think back to last week, we thought about our toy shop. Remember the toy shop? Getting kids ready for the real thing.

Okay? Well, these exact two problems the writer to the Hebrews picks up on. But he does more than that, the writer. The writer shows us that Jesus is our great high priest.

Okay? He is the one who not only addresses those two problems, but he is the one who this whole office of priest was pointing to. And this is what it says in Hebrews 7.

We'll put these words on the screen and we'll read this together and see how Jesus is the answer to these two problems. Okay, now there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office.

[17:45] Do you see the problem? But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need. One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day.

First for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Do you see it? He is the answer to these two problems. Jesus Christ. You know, here's another way of thinking about it. Okay, Hugh Grant, the actor. Hugh Grant, you got him in your head.

My flatmate at uni always used to make a joke about Hugh Grant. that he's in many, many films, but in each film he plays the same role.

[18:53] Think about that. Maybe that's harsh, I don't know. Every single film he plays the kind of proper Englishman. That's all he's got, right? And he's very good at it, but that's what he does.

All the films, but he plays one role. The more you get into Leviticus, you see that Jesus is the opposite of Hugh Grant. Right?

If Leviticus was a film, one film, Jesus is playing the many roles. Okay, do you see how Jesus isn't just everything that the sacrifice pointed to?

That's fulfilled in him. Jesus is everything that the priest was pointing to as well. Okay, he is our great go-between. He is the only go-between between God and man.

And let me just say, this is where we respectfully and lovingly disagree with our Catholic friends. Because no saint can play this role. No person wearing a robe or a dog collar can play this role.

[20 : 00] And in our own circles, right, friends, a worship leader can play this role. No pastor, no elder can play this role. Jesus is the only go-between between God and man.

Jesus is the only one who can lead us into God's presence. And to claim that anyone else can do that, to use that language, is to rob him of glory. He is the great and only go-between.

And one of the priests, things that they wear, is the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them. Representing the people to God.

Well, as it were, Jesus bears our names in him as he stands having defeated death at God's right hand in heaven.

And what is he doing there? He is interceding for us. Friends, we fail, he's praying. We fall, he's praying.

[21 : 07] We mess up, he's praying. That's who he is. That's where he is. And I hope that encourages you this morning, whatever's going on in your life. That that is what Jesus ever lives to do.

He's not sitting in heaven having accomplished his work, twiddling his thumbs. He's praying for us. We have a priest who's doing that and we have a priest who sympathizes with us in our weakness. We have a priest who knows who you are. We have a priest, you have a priest who knows what you're going through. You have a priest who knows your needs and you have a priest who loves you like you wouldn't believe was ever possible.

And you have a priest who has made it his life mission to pray for you in the best place possible at the right hand of the Father as the Lion of Judah and as the Lamb who was slain.

That's your priest. And that's what the New Testament is telling us. It's been all about him. It's been all about that priest. And in a very spiritual sense but in nonetheless a very real sense, friends, because we are caught up in him, because we are in him, we are in the very presence of God because of Jesus.

[22 : 24] He is our great go-between. You know, in the words of Robert Murray McShane, famous Scottish minister from years ago, if I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.

Yet distance makes no difference because he is praying for me. You know, let me just finish by taking you back to the Rangers training ground.

Okay, remember those big gates that said no entry? Well, something happened when I was a teenager. My phone went one evening. Okay, and it was my mate and he was texting me. Okay, and because he was texting me, I knew it was something special because back then you paid 10 pence for a text, you could only have 160 characters and you'd only send it, being Scottish, if it was something special.

Okay, so he sent me a text and it said, well, it turned out the club had invited all the people who were living in the surrounding area to come and see inside the training ground.

Right, and my friend was near enough just in the catchment area that he got an invite. And so his text simply said, I got an invite. And then it said, and I get to bring a friend.

[23 : 40] Okay, and if he had a sense of humour he would have said to me, can you go and ask your brother if he's free? But he didn't do that. He said, would you like to come? Would you like to come? So there we are, we rock up the next Friday evening, jeans and a t-shirt and to our amazement, the guy in the door opens the gates and the gates open for us.

For us. Schoolkids, jeans and a t-shirt. The gates open for us and we're in, right? Honestly, it felt like Charlie from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. This is my golden ticket.

This is never going to happen again. I think in the end we were so excited they actually had to kick us out. But here's what I was so aware of that whole evening. I was in, not because of who I was.

Right? Jeans and a t-shirt. Not in because of who I was. I was in because of who he was. Because of who he was. Friends, how much more reason do we have to celebrate the news and take full advantage of the truth that Jesus, our great high priest, brings us into the presence of God because of our faith in him.

And maybe some of you need to do that this morning. You need to repent and trust in him. He brings us into the presence of God and, and he brings us in as a son and a daughter of the living God and we can address him and know him as father.

[25 : 07] friends, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we've got no words to say other than thank you thank you for sending your son.

Thank you for making a way for us through the gospel, through the atoning work of Jesus, through his blood of being brought into your presence. Let me just praise you for the love which you have lavished upon us.

And so, Father, I pray for anyone watching this here today who is struggling. I pray that you would help by your indwelling spirit, help lift their eyes to their great high priest Jesus Christ who is praying for them.

Thank you, Lord, for your just great love for us. And help us, Lord, just to take full advantage and to know you as father.

[26 : 24] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.