

The Offering of a Gift

Leviticus 2:1-16, 6:14-23

This afternoon we come to the second of the five sacrifices offered in the Old Covenant, sometimes called the meat offering, sometimes called the meal offering, or the cereal offering, or the grain offering. The King James translation of meat offering is actually misleading to us, since we use the word “meat” to refer to the body of an animal and not more generally to speak simply of food and sustenance. “Cereal offering” probably makes you think about a bowl of rice krispies. So I think “grain offering” is the best name for it, as most of our English translations put it.

The root word in the Hebrew actually means “to give,” and as I emphasized two weeks ago when we studied the burnt offering, worship is something that we give to God. Remember the call to worship which I read, beginning our service this afternoon, from,

Ps. 96:7 “Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

The distinctive feature of the burnt offering, again from last time, is that the whole animal is burned in sacrifice to the Lord. It is all for the Lord, appropriately representing both the sacrifice of our whole lives in service to God as well as the perfect and complete offering of Jesus by whose shed blood we are cleansed.

The meal offering has one distinctive feature as well. There was no blood. This was the only one of the Old Testament sacrifices that was not bloody. No animal was killed. Instead, the offering was of flour. The description of this offering is given in,

v.1

And here is what you must have absolutely clear in your mind in order to understand this particular sacrifice. This offering came after, as the consequence of, a burnt offering.

The grain offering does not have reference to atonement or redemption. It has no reference to the cleansing of sin that is necessary for God’s people to be found acceptable in his sight. After all, there was no blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

So this sacrifice was,

I. AN OFFERING OF LOVE BY WORSHIPPERS WHO WERE ALREADY REDEEMED.

Those who had sacrificed the burnt offering, those who had already entered the presence of a holy God by reference to the blood of the lamb, now come with the expression of their love.

In other words, once redemption is accomplished, the redeemed worshipper of God gives the Lord his whole life in loving gratitude. Once he has been redeemed, once he has been justified by faith, then he begins to do good works. And that’s the sense of this grain offering. It represents the good works of believers who were saved by grace through faith.

Therefore,

A. The grain offering was given in conjunction with the burnt offering.

We see that connection in,

Num. 29:1 ‘And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets. 2

‘You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. 3 ‘Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, 4 ‘and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; 5 ‘also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; 6 ‘besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.”

The grain offering, in a sense then, belongs to the burnt offering. It is attached to it. As that chapter continues,

Num. 29:9 ‘Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, 10 ‘and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; 11 ‘also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.”

That phrase is repeated frequently in that chapter, for the sacrifices of each day of that great Feast of Trumpets. “The regular burnt offering with its grain offering.”

Before I go any deeper into this study of the grain offering, let me emphasize how crucial this concept is for us today. Simply put, you can’t offer an acceptable gift to God unless you are first redeemed by the blood of the lamb! You can’t perform any acceptable good works, represented by the grain offering, until you are first born again by the power of God. That’s what is so wrong with the social gospel of good works to men. Doing good to others is not an acceptable sacrifice of worship to God, unless and until your sins have been cleansed by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And that is where classic liberalism is so wrong, as well as the so-called social justice or even racial reconciliation movement of our current cultural climate. This is how preaching actually ceases to be preaching, where so many churches of our own day actually cease to be churches. If the message of the pulpit is first and foremost, “Do good to others and be good in the way that you live,” and the necessity of being saved by grace through faith in Jesus is absent, then you will remain dead in your sins and under the condemnation of eternal hell. No matter how good you try to be! It just isn’t good enough! It never will be.

And that was the problem with Cain’s offering, described for us in Genesis 4.

Gen. 4:3 “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.”

What was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice, his grain offering? We read in Hebrews 11 that “by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

Evidently that wasn’t the case for Cain. His offering wasn’t made in faith, that is, as a testimony of faith that he was acceptable to God on the basis of the blood of the lamb who would atone for his sin. Cain attempted to do a good work and find acceptance before God on that basis.

He offered a grain offering without the burnt offering! He was a guilty sinner trying to be saved by his good works. And he failed.

The message of the gospel is the message of the cross, that Jesus Christ died to satisfy the wrath and justice of God so that sinful and unholy men could be saved from that condemnation. By faith.

So before this grain offering could become a sweet aroma to the Lord, the burnt offering was prescribed. But once that burnt offering was made, and once there was reconciliation between a holy God and sinful creature, then,

B. The grain offering was given as an expression of consecration.

I could use the very practical example of the money you put in the offering plates. If that money is connected with any thought that you are showing yourself to be a good person, worthy of a relationship with God on the basis of your own goodness, then your offering is a stench in the sight of God! If you think that your relationship with God is established and reconciled because you put money in the plate, then you are wasting your money!

I had a good friend in college who always would say, “God doesn’t want your money if he doesn’t have your heart, and if he has your heart, he already has your money.” That expresses this idea well. God doesn’t want the grain offering unless you have already come to him with a burnt offering. But for those who are redeemed, he is honored by your sacrifice of devotion.

Your consecration. And here is the emphasis of this chapter. Let’s look more closely at the descriptions given. In verse 1 we read of flour, oil and frankincense.

The flour was the main part, and the grain was the basic staple of the Israelite diet in. It was the substance of his whole life, represented by the outward image of food. The food was

anointed with oil, set apart, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. And the frankincense provided the fragrance that made the offering so acceptable and of such sweet aroma before the Lord.
v.2

Like the burnt offering, provisions seem to be made for people of various degrees of riches and wealth, such that no matter how rich or poor, a man could always bring a grain offering.
v.4-9

Further, with this sense of consecration, notice also,
v.11

No leaven and no honey. Leaven typically indicates corruption at work. And in the words of Andrew Bonar, whose 1846 commentary is my most trusted resource in preparation for these studies, “If we give grudgingly, with restless, impatient, tumultuous, anxious feelings, we are offering with leaven!”

So there must be no leaven. Nothing which brings corruption.

Listen to what James says to those who offer to God a portion of their worldly wealth, by not their whole heart. They put money in the offering plate, but they don’t love Jesus.

James 5:1 “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.”

Instead, the preservative salt was to be added to the grain offering, according to,
v.13

And as Jesus would later say, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?”

So our consecration to God is to be seasoned and preserved as with salt. Yet no honey was to be added either, according to verse 11, nothing that speaks of carnal sweetness, nothing that is of the nature of luxury. The Lord desires nothing of earthly sweetness.

Perhaps the idea of the prohibitions against honey and leaven is that there is nothing we can add on our own strength to make our offerings more acceptable. Nothing that we do externally, no outward forms or extra ingredients, make this offering of any more value in the eyes of the Lord. Just the complete and total devotion of our hearts.

Let me give you an example of such an offering. Consider, Phil. 4:14 “Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”

That money was a grain offering! Let it be that the money you give would be like this money from the Philippians, a sweet-smelling aroma. Let the time that you spend laboring for the Lord, however you may be doing that, let that service be your grain offering.

So it is, however unimportant and menial your task might be in service to the Lord, however distasteful it might even be to your own experiences, that which is done in the Lord and for the Lord is a pleasing aroma in his sight! That which is done as an act of consecration or devotion to God is a sweet aroma. It isn't honey that makes a sweet aroma to the Lord, it is the devotion of your heart.

And in that context, as you “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven,” let all those good works be an expression of gratitude. Just like this offering.

C. The grain offering was given as an expression of thanksgiving.

The firstfruits, we read in,
v.12

And, v.14

The firstfruits was a testimony of thanksgiving. In an agricultural context, it means one thing quite obviously, that God has provided for the harvest. And when the harvest first begins, the worshipper offers to God the first portion in gratitude, trusting by faith that as God brought the beginning of the harvest, he shall also provide everything that is needed for our sustenance.

I hope you see the connection with our practice of tithing. We give to God the first portion of the increase, with thanksgiving.

Deut. 26:1 “And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, 2 “that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your

land that the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. 3 “And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’ 4 “Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 “And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God: ‘My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6 ‘But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. 7 ‘Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. 8 ‘So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. 9 ‘He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, “a land flowing with milk and honey”; 10 ‘and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God. 11 “So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the LORD your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you.”

That’s what we are to do in worship! “Rejoice in every good thing which the LORD your God has given to you and your house.” “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

And I should add that this grain offering was prescribed for special occasions of thanksgiving, such happy occasions as the cleansing of a leper in Leviticus 14 and the consummation of the

Nazarite vow in Numbers 6. It was also probably observed after periods of cleansings, such as after a woman’s giving birth, or someone freed from abscesses or discharges.

It was an expression of thanksgiving. And so we are called to, Ps. 96:8 “Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts.”

You meet God first at the altar of the burnt offering, where the blood was poured out. Then you offer your own life as grain offering.

To bring out one aspect of this consecration, notice that this grain offering was,

II. AN OFFERING OF LOVE FOR THE WELL BEING OF OTHERS.

I already mentioned Paul’s praise to the Philippians, for the money they sent. A sweet smelling aroma. Quite personally, I experience this every month when our treasurer gives me a check from the church general fund. It is your grain offerings that support me and pay my bills. Among many other things, your money becomes my sustenance.

In the Old Covenant context, this offering was for the benefit of the priests. It was,

A. An offering of food for those in need.

And the priests were in need because God gave them no other provisions!

v.3

Turn over to chapter 6, where as I mentioned last week, the instructions for the priests are given, regarding each type of sacrifice.

Verse 17 is particularly noteworthy, where God speaks of the priest's portion as "their portion of My offerings." Such a full communion between God and his people. We share in the same offerings which God calls his own.

And don't miss the ultimate purpose. The ultimate purpose for your giving to the support of those who labor in the ministry of the word today, and those who labored in the temple as priests in the Old Covenant. It is for God's glory. The grain offering was,

B. An offering of food bringing glory to God.

Look back at,

v.2

The same idea is repeated in verse 9, and again in verses 15-16. A portion of the grain offering is a memorial. Actually, the offering is the means by which the offerer, the worshiper, is brought into God's remembrance. Our good works are to be such a memorial, such a testimony. They ascend to heaven as a memorial. They are recognized by God, in such a way that he himself receives all the glory. The smoke of the fire and the fragrance of the frankincense ascends to heaven. And ascribe glory to God!

Do you remember Cornelius, who is described in Acts 10:2 as "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always."

Look at how God speaks to Cornelius.

Acts 10:3 "About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4

And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God."

What a marvelous expression! So it should be for us. Our prayers and our alms should rise up to heaven with the sweet aroma of a grain offering. And they will, if we first meet with God at that bronze altar of the burnt offering where the blood of the lamb was spilt!

And that leads me to the place where I want to end this afternoon, with the very same emphasis as last week upon the way in which Jesus himself is this offering.

Jesus is the perfect burnt offering, offered once for all for the remission of our sins. And Jesus is the perfect grain offering. For this sacrifice is,

III. AN OFFERING OF LOVE REPRESENTING THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

This is all a picture of what Jesus has already done. His good works. His active obedience, which is his constant and continual submission to all the obligations of the law. He obeyed the law perfectly. He performed every good work perfectly. And,

A. His life of perfect obedience is the perfect grain offering.

Notice this detail about the grain offering. The priest was to present a grain offering for himself. And when that was the case, the whole thing was burned.

Turn to, 6:22-23

Now, who is it that can be represented by such a full and perfect expression of devotion and consecration? Why, only Jesus. This is what Jesus alone can say,

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

And John 4:34 “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”

So Jesus is the grain offering. Jesus is represented in all these details in Leviticus 2. But now let me go back to that great image of the priest feeding upon this offering. And think of yourselves, in the New Covenant, as a kingdom of priests. A royal priesthood. And remember that,

1 Peter 2:5 “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Well, if you are the priests of the New Covenant, all of you, and Jesus is the grain offering, then dear friends, let us come to this table today and eat his flesh and drink his blood as it is offered to you. For Jesus says to you,

John 6:48 “I am the bread of life. 49 “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” [We read that...]52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” 53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 “For My flesh

is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 “This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

B. Jesus is the bread which sustains our life as new covenant priests.

If Jesus is the perfect grain offering, then let us eat our portion, just like Aaron and his sons ate, with thanksgiving. For Jesus says to us, “Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

“With unleavened bread it shall be eaten in a holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of meeting they shall eat it.”