

Take Aaron

Leviticus 8:1-36

Growing up, one of my brothers work on a farm every summer, picking vegetables. One of the benefits of that job was his ability to bring home freshly picked corn on the cob. So we would eat the within an hour of it being picked.

I want you to imagine eating that ear of corn this afternoon, thinking particularly about what has to happen before you can eat it. It is the job I really don't like doing. But, of course, it has to be done. Shucking.

That is a good illustration of what I am attempting to do in this study of Leviticus. To get down to the kernels, and to fully enjoy them, we need to peel away all the husks. All of the outward, external, ceremonial aspects of these animal sacrifices make up that husk. And like corn growing in the fields, those husks have great value, in the Old Testament. The value for us is this, underneath them grows the great kernels of truth for us to grasp. And to uncover. And that is what I am attempting to do.

This book of Leviticus was the directory for worship for God's people of the nation of Israel. With minute and exact detail. Probably more details than you want to read about or study. There are details here as I read them this week, that I forgotten about entirely. Things like what you read in,

v.24 "Then he brought Aaron's sons. And Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar."

So what does that have to do with us? Leviticus is no longer a directory for worship, and it does not prescribe the elements of

worship for New covenant worshippers, since Jesus' sacrifice was, as the book of Hebrews says, "once for all." And yet, these Old Covenant details ARE worthy of study, because the principles of worship that they teach us are still valid.

Leviticus still teaches us how to worship. And that's the point of our study. The book teaches us what worship really is. And what it means. It teaches us the goal of worship, the purpose of worship. And one reason God's people today know so very little about worship is because they know so very little about the book of Leviticus nor about the OT in general.

My goal in this whole study, however successful I may or may not be in achieving that goal, is to use this book for your instruction in righteousness, that you may be complete, thoroughly equipped for the good work of worship.

So what have we learned so far? To summarize five sermons in one sentence, we have learned that worship is the offering of sacrifices to God. It still is. Today, in that context, we come to the subject of priests in chapter 8.

I. PRIESTS MUST BE IDENTIFIED AS LEADERS FOR WORSHIP.

Now, in the Old Covenant, only one of the twelve tribes was set apart to be priests, the tribe of Levi. And actually, only one branch of the Levites, Aaron and his descendants. That's what we come to in,

v.1-2

Now, all that follows actually repeats what you can read in Exodus 29, but something terrible had happened between Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. In Exodus 32, we read about the golden calf.

Ex. 32:1 “Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” 2 And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3 “So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” 5 So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.” 6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”

Because of that golden calf, there would be considerable doubt whether or not Aaron would retain his calling as a priest, but God puts an end to all those doubts. Aaron and his sons would be priests. They would be the spokesmen for men in the holy presence of God. And we'll have much more to say about that as we study this book. But for today, with the consecration of Aaron and his sons to be the priestly leaders of worship, we learn more about what worship really is.

Notice the gathering of the congregation.
v.3-4

“The tabernacle of meeting.” That’s a good name for it. Tabernacle meant dwelling place, and this Old Covenant tabernacle was the dwelling place of God, the place where he chose to meet with his people. So it is, that,

A. Worship is a meeting between God and his covenant people.

That’s one of the great kernels of corn for you to enjoy. And chew on. And fully digest. Worship is a meeting with God! Worship is the occasion that we creatures have to assemble ourselves in the presence of God. We gather together, and God meets with us.

Go back with me for a moment to,

Ex. 29:43 “And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. 44 “So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. 45 “I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. 46 “And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.”

People today often speak about worship in terms of “what I get out of it,” and while there are dangers in having that sort of emphasis, let me utilize it for my point this afternoon. This is what you should get out of worship. You should be made aware that you have met with Almighty God! Or perhaps more accurately, that Almighty God has met with you. And really believe it! God is in this place. And this is his word. And his Holy Spirit is among us, teaching us that word.

Now, there are a lot of ways to experience that, but this idea is over all else when it comes to understanding worship. When we gather, God says, “There I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory.”

That’s why this building is called a sanctuary. Because God sanctifies it, sets it apart with his glory. And so God declares to

us, “I will dwell among [you] and [I] will be [your] God.”

Therefore, because of this understanding of worship, this crucial idea follows,

B. Worship is offered to God according to his own commands.

This is very, very practical. We don't chose to do in worship whatever it is that we want to do! It is not up to us to decide what we ought to do in worship and what we ought not to do.

Over the years I have been in lots of church meetings that were called worship services, but they weren't really that at all. There were lots of things done that God had not commanded at all. Movies. Personal interviews. Dancing. Musical entertainment performed for the applause of the audience. Dramatic presentations. Slide shows. And on and on.

And while all those things might be perfectly acceptable and edifying activities, they do not constitute the worship of God. So if you don't get anything else out of Leviticus 8, realize this. Everything that was done was done according to God's command. For example,

v.4-5

Also,
v.34-36

Notice also verses 9, 13, 17, 21, and 29. You see the repeated emphasis of the words, “As the Lord had commanded Moses.” We see those words also in chapter 9, verses 6,7,10 and 21.

Then we will see in chapter 10 the consequences of failing to

worship as the Lord had commanded, when the two sons of Aaron are killed for their transgressions.

Lev. 10:1 “Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.”

So it is that we learn in the New Covenant, that we must worship “God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

Thus, we worship him in the manner in which he himself prescribes, for his own glory. And though the outward forms have certainly changes, this Old Covenant principle is still valid.

Deut. 12:29 “When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30 “take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ 31 “You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

How do we worship the Lord the way the nations serve their gods, today? Most of all, I believe, we make it entertainment. We fashion it according to our own desires and needs, for our own entertainment. And for our own consumption. And in doing so, the church often imitates the world, failing to worship God according to his commands.

To counter that temptation, we have included in these commands the regulations regarding priests. Priests who would offer the sacrifices we have been studying for the last several weeks. Specifically,

II. PRIESTS MUST BE SET APART FOR THE OFFERINGS OF WORSHIP.

For worship, we are to have priests, consecrated priests. That is the emphasis in this chapter.

v.30-33

This particular ceremony took seven whole days. Talk about a long ordination ceremony! Look at what happened first. They were washed.

v.6

A. Washed from the guilt of sin.

And remember that golden calf! Aaron was guilty as well. The priests themselves needed to be washed. So God provided them with a wash basin.

Go back with me to,

Ex. 30:17 “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 18 “You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, 19 “for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. 20 “When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. 21 “So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them--to him and his descendants throughout their generations.”

What was the first thing the priest had to do when he entered the tabernacle, before he went to the altar to sacrifice? He went to the bronze laver. He went to the sink and washed his hands! For they were dirty!

On this consecration day, in Leviticus 8, the priests were washed. They were, therefore, set apart by the washing of water so that they might be considered clean and acceptable to God. As priests.

That complete washing is what is happening in Leviticus 8 at this initial consecration, and every time the priest entered the tabernacle after that point, he would simply wash his hands. To use that illustration of the corn kernels and the husk again, Aaron and his sons are imperfect, human priests, who show us by way of contrast, the glory of the perfection of Jesus, who is now our high priest. When the husks of the OT ceremonies are removed, we are left with what is described in Hebrews 7, which is Jesus as our priest.

Heb. 7:23 “Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

But even further, I could ask the question, are there priests

today in the church? Other than Jesus as High Priest. Yes. So who are they? Clearly, they are not restricted to the line of Aaron. This is one of those kernels, being exposed when the husks are all torn away. We are all priests!

Consider what John writes in,

Rev. 1:4 “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

And likewise, Peter.

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.”

So you are all priests, holy priests, anointed to proclaim his praises in worship! And that is the great truth of this chapter that stands out above everything else. What happened in the consecration of Aaron and his sons, has happened to us, in Jesus Christ! Therefore, we offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through our faith in Jesus Christ!

Going back to Leviticus 8, the point is that in order for us to worship as priests, like Aaron and his sons, we must be washed from the guilt of sin. Thus, as I have read in previous weeks,

Heb. 10:22 “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

This is why we have a confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness near the beginning of our worship services each Lord’s Day. That confession of sin corresponds to the OT Priest washing his hands at the bronze laver. When you come into the sanctuary of God’s presence, you have one very obvious need. You need to wash your hands! You need to be cleansed of sin.

Hence, our corporate confession. Followed by the moment of greatest encouragement in the whole service! The declaration of forgiveness. We are cleansed!

Back again to Leviticus 8. Look at what happens next in this seven day consecration ceremony. The priests are,

B. Clothed with the clothes of righteousness.

v.7-9

And, v.13

There is too much there to actually study in detail, so the question is, how does that apply to us? Well, clothes, especially a uniform, draw attention to the office or function of a person, as opposed to his individual personality. A uniform emphasizes his job rather than his name. So these clothes mark out the glory and splendor of the office of the priesthood!

These clothes are called “holy garments” in Exodus 28. But still the question for us. If we are priests, what are the holy garments we must wear in worship? Surely they are not our own clothes! Remember what John says to the Lukewarm church of the Laodiceans, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

So what clothes should we wear?

Rev. 3:18 “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Our white garments, the holy, priestly garments, come from Christ. They are his clothes! His righteousness. We are clothed with Christ himself! We are covered, just like this OT priests with clothes of righteousness. Clothes of Jesus’ righteousness.

And when we are clothed in that way, like the priests of Leviticus, we are,

C. Set apart for the work of the temple.
v.10-12

Having been cleansed, now the priests are anointed. And so are we! We are cleansed, not with water, but the blood of Jesus. And we are anointed, not by some oil, but by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit himself. Set apart for worship by the Holy Spirit.

For Aaron, it wasn’t just a little oil, either. A reference in Psalm 133 makes that clear, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.”

So it is for us. We are washed, clothed, and anointed. All by grace. We are priests offering our sacrifices in the Holy Place of God’s presence, every time we gather for worship.

Then what do we do? We offer our own sacrifices of worship.

III. PRIESTS MUST PRESENT OFFERINGS TO BE MADE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.

Typically, we don’t call ourselves priests. In the fuller sense, as priests, we are now called worshippers, according to,

John 4:24 “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

And as worshipers, first, there are,

A. Sin and trespass offerings to satisfy God’s justice.
v.14-17

And the kernel of corn for us today, when the husk is removed? We confess our sins and plead for forgiveness, for Jesus “Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” Then, like the priests of Leviticus, we offer,

B. Burnt offerings to demonstrate whole hearted devotion.
v.18-19

The new covenant fulfillment of that is in,

Rom. 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

So you come to God in worship, with your whole life. And give it to him. Lay it upon the altar. “All for Jesus! All for Jesus! [As we sing.] All my being’s ransomed powers, all my thoughts and words and doings, all my days and all my hours. Let my hands perform his bidding, let my feet run in his ways; let me eyes see Jesus only, let my lips speak forth his praise.”

That’s our sacrifice of a burnt offering. And then there are the,

C. Peace offerings to show forth communion.

Remember that peace offering, where the worshipper, the priest, and the Lord all had their portion. There was communion between God and his people!

In the Old Testament shadows, we read,
v.22-29

And what is that peace offering of us today? It is the banquet table around which also feast, in communion with Christ. It is the Lord's table, where he is present with us, and where we eat his bread and drink his blood, a sacramental symbol of the communion that really does exist between a holy God and his redeemed people, whom he calls worshippers!

It is what we did together this morning. The peace offering. According to God's own command, we eat common and ordinary elements that have been set apart for this sacrament. So that by eating and drinking, we have communion with God. He is here with us!

1 Cor. 10:16 "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

So, dear friends, come to Jesus. Come to the presence of God. With warm and fervent hearts, come. Come, cleansed by the blood of Christ, and clothed in his righteousness, come. Anointed by the overflowing power of the Holy Spirit, come. Come, even as I invited you this afternoon with that call to worship from,

Heb. 10:19 "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near

with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."