

Hebrews 13:7-25
Leviticus 7
Psalm 50

“A Pleasing Sacrifice”

June 20, 2021

Leviticus is all about the holiness of the people of God.

But you cannot talk about holiness until you have dealt with sin.
Therefore Leviticus starts with the sacrifices, and then goes on to talk about holiness.
Because of what God has done for you in the sacrifice,
now live before him as his holy people.

But there is a clear *order* in the sacrifices.

First, you bring the burnt offering – where the whole animal is burnt in the fire.
The burnt offering is given entirely to God –
as a way of saying, “We are yours – we are here to worship *you*.”

Then the grain offerings (and the sin and guilt offerings) are brought –
with a portion burnt in the fire – and the rest given to the priest.

This communicates our need for a mediator –
a priest who intercedes before God.

Finally, you bring the peace offerings –
where a portion is burnt in the fire, a portion is given to the priests,
and the rest is cooked and eaten by the worshipers.

This signifies that we have peace with God through the sacrifice –
and therefore we eat and drink and rejoice together before him.

The NT will show how Jesus is *all of the above*.

He is the burnt offering – the one in whom we approach God.

He is the grain offering – the sin offering – and the guilt offering –
and he is the great high priest who intercedes for us with the Father.

And he is the peace offering – through whom we have peace with God –
and we partake of him at the Lord’s Table – we partake of the peace offering!

In response we are singing Psalm 50.

Psalm 50 addresses a common misunderstanding.

We sometimes think that in the OT,
all you had to do was offer sacrifices to become right with God.

But offering sacrifices are not a “get out of jail free” card!

God does not *need* our sacrifices.

If we are intent on living contrary to what God has said,
then there is no sacrifice that can atone for our sin.

This is the point that we have heard from Hebrews,

“If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth,
there is no longer a sacrifice for sins” (10:26)

This is why Psalm 50 speaks of offering to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
which Hebrews 13 will speak of as a “sacrifice of praise.”
It’s not merely sacrificing a “thank offering” – not just going through the motions –
but offering thanksgiving *as* your offering –
drawing near to God with a whole heart!

I recently spoke with a man who reminded me of the importance of *being still* before God.
He had been burned out by all the busyness of our modern way of doing church.
We need to be careful – because it can get really tempting
to think that the way that we serve God is by doing, doing, doing!

“The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;
to one who orders his way rightly
I will show the salvation of God!”

Sing Psalm 50
Read Hebrews 13

Hebrews says that we are supposed to offer sacrifices to God.
So, next week, who wants to bring the cow?
Anyone got a goat?
We’ll probably need drop cloths to prevent the blood from getting on the carpet!

What *does* it mean when it says “let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name”!

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

The sacrificial system of the NT does not require the death of animals –
but instead the putting to death of our own selfish desires.

The sacrifices that please God are the words and deeds that flow from the cross.

You can bring a sacrifice that will please God–
but only because Jesus has offered the once-for-all sacrifice
that has made us right with God.

1. The Cross and the Altar: Jesus’ Sacrifice “Outside the Camp” (7-12)

⁷ *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

We saw last time that Hebrews has called us to “let brotherly love continue,”
and reminds us of our leaders–those who spoke the word of God to us.

Remember those who taught you the word of God--
“consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Hebrews 11 gave us a picture of this – and church history ever since continues to show us.
Over the last 2,000 years there have been many such leaders to remember.

We can look back over centuries of faithful preachers,
those who stood firm in the midst of trial and proclaimed Christ.

But consider the outcome of their way of life.

Consider the results of their preaching—and the results of their lives.
And imitate their faith.

You are not called to imitate everything about your leaders.
No pastor, no elder, is perfect.

Rather, imitate their faith—imitate them as they show you Christ.

Because:

⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Yesterday—when your leaders were tested, the gospel of Christ was their refuge.

Today—when you are tested, the same gospel is your hope!

And forever, this teaching of Jesus Christ the Son of God will endure.

And so (verse 9), ⁹ *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings,*

The contrast should be clear.

There is *one* teaching that endures—the teaching that you heard from your leaders.

Diverse and strange teachings will arise—

so remember the word of God that was spoken by your leaders.

What are these strange teachings that Hebrews warns against?

For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

This is a reference to the Jewish feasts, and indeed, to Jewish ideas about food more generally.

Hebrews has been warning his hearers against “going back” to Judaism,
which he insists would be a repudiation of Christ.

The OT feasts were designed as sacrificial meals,
in which the worshipers partook of the sacrifices,
all of which pointed forward to Christ.

Now that Christ has come, and the great sacrifice has been offered to the Father,
the Jewish feasts – and the OT food laws – no longer have the same meaning.

If someone tells you that Passover, and Pentecost, and Tabernacles,
and the Day of Atonement,

are special days, and that participating in these feasts is a route to spiritual growth,

do not listen.

Indeed, in Jewish custom, the daily blessing over the meal included the words of Psalm 104:15,
“You give bread to strengthen man’s heart,”
which turned every meal into a “means of grace.”
But Hebrews says that the heart is to be strengthened by grace,
not by foods which have benefitted those devoted to them.

The Jewish idea of grace had become too earthly.
They had lost sight of what it was all about.

And so Hebrews says in verse 10:

¹⁰ *We have an altar from which those who serve the tent^[a] have no right to eat.*

And no, this is not just talking about the Lord’s Supper.
If Hebrews was saying, you need to leave all the Jewish feasts behind,
and come to the Lord’s Table!--
then he would merely be substituting one set of rituals for another.
He would be just as earth-bound as the Jews.

“We have an altar.”

Does that remind you of anything Hebrews has said before?

Now the point of what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest,
one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,
a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man! (8:1-2)

We have a high priest.
We have an altar.

Why on earth would you want to hang out around an earthly altar,
partaking of earthly sacrifices,
when you can enter the heavenly holy of holies,
and partake of the heavenly sacrifice!
We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

Yes, we do that here at the Lord’s Table,
but do not confuse the Lord’s Table with the Lord’s Altar!

The Altar, where he offered his blood before the Father,
is in heaven.

This is why I call you every Lord’s Day to “lift up your hearts!”
Because as long as your eyes are fixed on the earthly bread, and the earthly table,

then you do not see as you ought.

We see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor, because of the suffering of death—
we see HIM!

Because *he* has brought us into the heavenlies through the veil of his flesh,
and now we behold him—*by faith!*

In verses 11-12 Hebrews explains why those who serve the earthly tent
cannot come to Christ's altar.

*¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest
as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in
order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*

Doesn't it all make perfect sense now?

Talk about strange teaching!

What is Hebrews doing here?

Hebrews is saying "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

Yesterday, in the OT, the body of the sacrifice was burned outside the camp.

This is a reference to Leviticus 16, the Day of Atonement —
that greatest and most powerful sacrifice of the OT.

And on the Day of Atonement, the animals slaughtered for the sin offerings,
whose blood was used to make atonement,
were not to be eaten—they were to be taken outside the camp
and burned with fire.

The idea of the sin offering was that the animal takes the sin upon itself,
and so you take this sin-laden animal and burn it outside the camp,
as far away from God's presence as you can get—
in other words, you send the animal to hell (figuratively speaking!)

And that is why Jesus suffered outside the gate—outside of Jerusalem—
because he was the sin offering for his people.

He was taken away from God's presence—away from the temple—
away from the city of God,
in order to sanctify his people through his own blood.

Jesus is the sin offering.

And so today, since Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever,
we must go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

2. Bearing His Reproach: Our Sacrifice of Praise "Outside the Camp" (13-16)

¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

Hebrews is simply drawing on what Jesus told us:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

The call of discipleship is the call of the cross.

You are called bear the reproach that Christ endured.

As he endured the taunts of the wicked, so must you.

The servant is not greater than his master.

Hebrews is talking to people who are being excluded from the Jewish community.

They are being shunned by the synagogue—

and Hebrews says, you must be willing to surrender your ties to the earthly city.

¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

We are pilgrims.

A pilgrim is different from a nomad.

We are not nomads!

A nomad has no permanent home.

A nomad lives in a tent, and that tent is his home.

We are pilgrims.

Because while here we have no lasting city,

we do have a city that we call home: the heavenly city—the city that is to come.

If you have trusted in Christ, then you have been alienated from the earthly city.

You are no longer a citizen of the earthly Jerusalem (or America, or South Bend).

Your identity is bound up with Jesus, your heavenly king,

and his city is now your city.

NOW we are ready to understand what kind of sacrifice we can bring to God!

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

On the Day of Atonement, the sin offering was the foundation of every other sacrifice.

Indeed, without the sin offering on the Day of Atonement,
the whole sacrificial system would come crashing down.

Even so,

without Christ’s atoning sacrifice in the heavenlies,

where he offered his blood before the throne of God,

you can do *nothing* to please God.

But, *through him*—and **only through him**—we may continually offer up our sacrifice of praise,
the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. (v15)

And the sacrifice of praise starts, as you might imagine, with the lips—
it starts by thanking God for the great sacrifice that we have in Jesus.
But the sacrifice of praise is not exhausted by our lips.
After all, it is the *fruit* of lips that acknowledge the name of Jesus.
And that fruit includes “doing good” and “sharing what you have.”
These are sacrifices that please God.

¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

But, some would say, “all our righteousness is as filthy rags!
There is nothing we can do to please God!”

Certainly, those who are trying to win God’s favor by “doing good” are doomed to failure.
And for that matter, it’s not as though God says, “okay, I’ll hire you by grace,
but then you’ve got an annual performance review coming up each year!”

No, the way that you please God is simply by being who you are in Christ.
Jesus, the Son of God, has through his sacrifice, brought many sons to God.
And God is pleased with you because he is pleased with Christ.
And he is pleased with you because you look like Jesus.
And because he is pleased with you, he accepts your sacrifices,
even though your sacrifices fall far short of what he deserves.

Think of the pictures that your children draw for you.
Think of the little presents that they bring.
What value do they have?
I doubt any of these pictures will ever be hanging in an art gallery.
Or think of how delighted you are when your child does something right!
How pleased you are when your child freely shares his toys,
or when he finds something that needs to be done,
and does it without being asked!

But that is how God is pleased with you—
as a Father is pleased with his little children.
God is pleased with you when you do good and share what you have,
(when you show hospitality to strangers – when you honor the marriage bed –
when you remember those who are mistreated and in prison,
when you keep your life free from the love of money) –
because these things are evidence of his Spirit within you –
it is how you reveal that you are the children of God.

3. Obey and Pray for Your Leaders (17-19)

And as you live as a kingdom of priests,
offering spiritual sacrifices to God,

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those

who will have to give an account.

Given Hebrews repeated warnings against apostasy—
against returning to Judaism—
it appears that some within the church were turning to “strange teachings.”
How do you avoid strange teachings?
Remember your leaders?
The ones who taught you the word of God? (Verse 7)

Obey your leaders and submit to them.
Your leaders are charged with the spiritual care of the flock.
We will have to give an account to God of how we cared for you
—how we taught you.

We keep watch over your souls.
We live in a democratic age where everyone looks out for number one!
Hebrews says that your pastors, your elders, and your deacons,
are to keep watch over your souls.
This term “to keep watch” has an eschatological aspect to it—
I am a watchman, watching out for the eschatological salvation
of God’s people.
So when it says that we must give an account,
the account that we must give is for how well we watched over you—
and how well we brought Christ’s sheep through dangers to rest.

This is why I rejoice when you call me up and ask to talk about something that’s troubling you!
I want to know how to care for you well.
And so when you come and talk about the things that you’re struggling with,
that helps us to do what Hebrews says:

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

When you are trying to follow Jesus,
we rejoice!
If you are stubborn and headstrong, refusing to pay attention,
insisting on following strange teachings,
then we will lead with groaning!
But when you “do good and share what you have”
and when brotherly love continues to grow in the flock,
then it is a joy to lead and keep watch.

And so we ask,
¹⁸ *Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.* ¹⁹ *I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the*

sooner.

This is a standard feature of many NT epistles:
pray for us—pray for those who preach Christ to you, and to the nations,

Pray for your leaders.

We need wisdom.

Your prayers are powerful—

as Paul says in Philippians 1:19,

“I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ
this will turn out for my deliverance.”

If you would have wise and faithful leaders,
pray for us!

And at the same time,

the leaders must strive to act honorably in all things
and have a clear conscience before God and man.

Hebrews concludes with a blessing and a final appeal.

4. Final Blessing (20-25)

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us^[b] that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Having just spoken of “your leaders,”

this final blessing reminds us that Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep.

The God of peace is the one who equips us with everything good

(a euphemism for the Holy Spirit!)

that we may do his will and do that which is pleasing in his sight.

And as he has begun this by raising our Lord Jesus from the dead,

so also he works what is pleasing to him in us “through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory forever and ever.”

But he can't quite finish with the “Amen”!

He adds a brief appeal to “bear with my word of exhortation.”

²² I appeal to you, brothers,^[c] bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

Having finished his sermon,

he wants to also give them a couple pieces of information—
Timothy has been released, and he hopes that he will be able to come with Timothy soon.

This is the closest we get to identifying the author of the book of Hebrews.

Plainly it is someone who closely connected to Timothy –
and thus it is likely someone close to the apostle Paul.
But that’s as close as we get!

Then he gives his final greetings to the “leaders” and the “saints”
and says that those from Italy send their greetings as well.

Grace be with all of you.