

Elementary

*The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting
(Leviticus 1:1 ESV)*

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
(Matthew 5:17-18 ESV)*

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (Gal. 4:1-2 ESV)

What Does The Law Teach Us About Worship?

July 18th, 2021

Leviticus 23

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 23.

Last week we asked the question: “What Does the Law Teach Us About Sexuality?” That topic will likely be the most divisive issue that the church will face in the next fifty years. Our question for this morning brings us to the most divisive issue that the church has faced over the *last* fifty years. This issue has led to church splits. This issue has incited grandchildren to battle with their own grandparents. This issue has contributed to tribalism and targeted church and all kinds of abominations that plague evangelicalism today. Today, we are asking the question: “What Does the Law Teach Us About Worship?”

What Does The Law Teach Us About Worship?

Now, as we’ve said week after week throughout this series, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians referred to the Law as a “nanny” of sorts. Returning to the Law is like returning to the kindergarten classroom to remember the basics. We don’t want to STAY there, of course! We’ve graduated out of the finger painting and the lettered blocks. But, as we revisit the liturgical

calendar of the Israelites, we want to identify the ELEMENTARY principles that should inform our worship today.

As you look at Leviticus 23, imagine you are looking at the Israelite's annual family calendar. This is their entire year of corporate worship in one snapshot. This morning, we're going to look at every item on the calendar and we're going to apply the lessons that we learn along the way. Look with me to Leviticus 23, beginning in verse 1. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts. (Leviticus 23:1-2 ESV)

Let's stop here and learn one elementary lesson before we go any further. The Law teaches us that:

1. Worship trusts

The worship calendar that the Israelites structured their lives around was not the result of a vision-casting meeting between Moses and the Levites.

The Lord spoke. Moses listened. And the people obeyed. They obeyed, because they TRUSTED.

When the Israelites deviated from this pattern – when Nadab and Abihu tried to lead the way, and they brought strange fire before the altar – death and ruin was the result. God is holy, holy, holy and we can only come before Him on His terms. We are not the innovators. We are the listeners. God described to Moses EXACTLY how He was to be approached in worship, and it was the responsibility of Moses and the priesthood to follow those instruction to the T.

This elementary lesson carries forward into the New Testament. In the same way that the Israelites could only approach God on His terms, so too must we trust in the plan that God laid out for us. Jesus said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**
(John 14:6 ESV)

Do you hear that, worshipers? We're going to learn a number of elementary lessons about worship this morning, but this lesson stands above them all: We can only approach God on His terms – and He has made those terms clear. Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father. Anything else is “strange fire”.

Now, there are a number of “strange fires” in the world that would suggest that there are other ways to approach the Father, but I want to highlight one in particular that often rears its ugly head in the church, and that is the “strange fire” of legalism. Have you ever felt like you were too sinful to pray to God? Have you ever felt like you were too far behind in your devotions to allow yourself to sing on a Sunday morning? Have you ever bought the lie that your approach to God was dependant upon *your* worthiness or lack-there-of? That's legalism, and it is “strange fire.”

Hear me now: You have never ONCE obeyed enough, read your Bible enough, loved enough, and served enough to earn your way into God's presence! Not once! He is unapproachably HOLY! Legalism suggests that hard work and discipline can forge another way to the Father, but that is a lie from the pit of hell. If we could obey our way to the Father then there would be no NEED for Jesus! But we can't! We all fall short of the glory of God. We all need rescue. We all need a saviour.

Worship trusts in, holds fast to, and never strays away from God's plan, and God's plan is Jesus! We pray and God hears us because of JESUS! We sing and God delights in us because of JESUS! We wake up each morning and we do our best, and He is pleased with our slow-and-steady growth because of JESUS!

Do you believe that? Do you trust that you can stand before the Father because of Jesus? Worship begins there. But let's look now at the Israelite's worship calendar. Look with me at verse 3:

The Sabbath

³“Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places. (Leviticus 23:3 ESV)

This brings us to our next elementary lesson. Here, the Law teaches us that:

2. Worship rests

The Sabbath was built into the weekly calendar of the Israelites. Every Saturday, the whole nation of Israel ceased from their working and devoted themselves to worship and rest.

The Sabbath was a weekly reminder for the Israelites that God was God and they were not. They were creatures. Left to their own devices, they would work seven days a week. They would take their eyes off of Him, and they would work themselves to exhaustion. The fields needed to be harvested, the grain needed to be pressed, the animals needed to be fed, the meals needed to be prepared – every person in the camp felt as if the world would collapse if they didn't continue to hold it up at all times!

So, God said: “Stop. The fields can wait. The meal prep can wait. The world doesn't revolve around and depend upon you. It revolves around and depends upon Me. So, sit. Worship. Rest.”

God is wise, isn't He?

Some of you have bought into the lie that the world would fall apart if you ever stopped for a day. In your eyes, without saying it, you are the god of your little universe. But if you want to know how to worship then you need to learn how to rest.

What does this look like for us? Well, there are some evangelicals who believe that we should still be observing the Sabbath every Saturday. Some people I really love hold to that view. However, that doesn't line up with what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ **These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.** (Colossians 2:16-17 ESV)

Paul teaches us here that the Sabbath and every other festival that we are going to read about today was an OBJECT LESSON that prepared us for and pointed forward to Christ. The Sabbath was good! God instituted it for a reason! But it was ultimately a shadow. The real substance belongs to Christ.

So, how did the Sabbath point forward to Christ? It taught us that we were fundamentally *needy* people. It taught us that our striving would never be enough. It taught us that we will ultimately work ourselves to death unless we learn to let go and rest in God's provision. It prepared us to understand this announcement:

For the Son of Man is **lord of the Sabbath**. (Matthew 12:8 ESV)

It prepared us to hear this invitation from our Saviour:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest**. (Matthew 11:28 ESV)

Now, am I saying that in the New Covenant we should run ourselves ragged for seven days a week? Absolutely not. We still need physical rest, and we should structure our weekly schedules with a day that is devoted to rest and worship. And, if your work will permit it, you should take that rest on Sunday so that you can worship together with your brothers and sisters. However, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are not to pass judgement on each other regarding these days of rest. We are not to be legalistic in trying to impose *our* weekly rest onto others.

But, while we are to be gracious towards one another with respect to days and calendars, make no mistake, rest is a foundational aspect of worship, and I fear that many of us are neglecting it.

Worship rests in God's provision.

Look with me now to verses 4-8 where the Passover is described:

The Passover

⁴“These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. ⁵In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the Lord's Passover. ⁶And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. ⁷On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. ⁸But you shall present a food offering to the Lord for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

Here, we learn the elementary lesson that:

3. Worship remembers

The whole purpose of the Passover celebration was to remind the Israelites of the Exodus event. The ceremony included a re-enactment of the events that took place on the night of the tenth plague when the angel of death came through Egypt. The elements of the Passover aren't discussed in this passage, so we too will save those details for another day, but the point made in

this passage is that the Israelites were to observe the Passover on the 14th day of the first month every single year.

The very next day would begin the feast of Unleavened Bread. For this seven-day-long ceremony, the Israelites would only eat the food that they had taken with them in haste as they fled from Egypt. All in all, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread marked out eight days in the first month of the year where the Israelites would use food and story and worship to remind themselves of the redemption that God worked for them in Egypt.

Because Old Testament and New, we are prone to forget.

In what was certainly not a coincidence, as Jesus was sitting down at a table with his disciples celebrating the Passover, he picked up the bread and said to them:

“This is my body, which is for you. **Do this in remembrance of me.**”²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance of me.**”²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.** (1 Corinthians 11:24b-26 ESV)

In the same way that God instituted an immersive ceremony to keep the Israelites from forgetting *their* deliverance, so too has he instituted an immersive ceremony to keep us from forgetting *our* deliverance. Jesus picked up the Passover celebration and said, “Let me show you what this is *really* about. I am the lamb that was broken. My blood is the blood that was applied to the doorposts. My death is your ticket out of slavery. Eat this bread, and drink this cup, and don't stop coming back to this table until I return again in glory!”

Worship remembers! It retells! So, month after month we gather around the table in obedience to his command. And we sing songs that recount all that he accomplished for us. And we pray prayers that celebrate our deliverance. And we preach sermons that point back to the gospel. Worship remembers.

We need to move a bit quicker now so we're going to consider these ceremonies together. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread took place on the first month of the year. The next two ceremonies that we are going to consider took place after the first harvest. Look with me at verses 9-22 where we learn about the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Weeks.

The Feast of Firstfruits

⁹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹² And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹³ And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the Lord with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. ¹⁴ And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The Feast of Weeks

¹⁵ “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. ¹⁶ You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord. ¹⁷ You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the Lord. ¹⁸ And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. ¹⁹ And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. ²⁰ And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest. ²¹ And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

²² “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 23:9-22 ESV)

Here, the Law teaches us that:

4. Worship anticipates

As one commentator notes:

While the Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread celebrated the Lord’s deliverance from the old land (vv. 4-8), the offering of firstfruits and the Festival of Weeks celebrated his provision in the new land (vv. 9-22).¹

¹ Jay Sklar. *Leviticus TOTC*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 284.

Remember, the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for forty years! They had lived off of manna and quail for forty years! They had lived as nomads with no plot of land to call their own for FORTY LONG YEARS! But finally, after years of anticipation, God brought them to the promised land. They built houses, and they planted crops, and those crops grew! And then one day, an Israelite walked into the tabernacle with his harvest in hand and announced: “I’m here to offer my firstfruits!” What a joyful day that must have been!

The offering of firstfruits served to declare two statements simultaneously. First, it was an action of gratitude that declared, “I know that all that I have comes from the Lord!” Gratitude was baked right into the cake of Israelite worship because, as it has been said: “Thankfulness is one of the first emotions to evaporate”² God pencilled a season of gratitude right into the Israelite calendar.

But it was also a statement of joyful expectation. When the Israelite came in with that first sheaf from the field, he was declaring, “There will be MORE WHERE THIS CAME FROM!” These two ceremonies were declarations of gratitude and anticipation.

In the same way, our worship must be marked by anticipation – but the anticipation that is baked into *our cake* looks beyond the yearly harvest. We celebrate a *different* firstfruit, don’t we? This ceremony was certainly on the Apostle Paul’s mind when he declared:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV)

Do you see what Paul is doing here? He is teaching us that the offering of the firstfruits was ultimately pointing forward to Jesus and his resurrection! In the same way that the Israelite could point to the first sheaf from his harvest and joyfully declare: “God kept His promise! And more is on the way!!” Now we can point to our resurrected saviour and declare, “God kept His promise! More is on the way!!” That’s what our Easter service is all about!

Therefore, we sing, and preach, and pray, and LIVE with joyful anticipation of all that God is going to do! Because worship anticipates.

The final three ceremonies that we are going to study all fell on the seventh month. In the same way that the seventh *day* of the week was set apart for worship, so too was the seventh *month* of

² Jay Sklar. *Leviticus TOTC*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 282.

the year. The chief ceremony – the day of atonement – is one that we spent a whole sermon discussing a few weeks back so we will devote our attention to the group as a whole. Look with me at verses 23-44 as we consider the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths.

The Feast of Trumpets

²³ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴“Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. ²⁵ You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the Lord.” (Leviticus 23:9-25 ESV)

The Day of Atonement

²⁶ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁷“Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord.²⁸ And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. ²⁹ For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. ³⁰ And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. ³¹ You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. ³² It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

The Feast of Booths

³³ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁴“Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the Lord. ³⁵ On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. ³⁶ For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the Lord. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

³⁷ “These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day,³⁸ besides the Lord's Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord.

³⁹ “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.⁴⁰ And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. ⁴¹ You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever

throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. ⁴² You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, ⁴³ that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

⁴⁴ Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the Lord.

In these final ceremonies, we learn that:

5. Worship expresses

The seventh month began with the blast of trumpets and a feast! Then, on the tenth day of the month, the people were to fast and to humble themselves for the Day of Atonement. Then, five days later, they were to spend an entire week living in makeshift tents to remind them of their days in the wilderness.

As you read through this passage, are you struck by the breadth of worship expression? In the same month worship involved feasting and fasting, celebrating and mourning, sacrificing and camping. All of it was and appropriate response to that which was being celebrated. All of it served a purpose.

Just like the Psalms, the Israelite’s worship calendar covered a wide breadth of expression and emotion.

I would love to see us recapture that breadth somehow.

I had a great conversation a while back with one of my brothers in Christ about the differences in expressiveness that exist within the church. On one extreme is a group that expresses reverence and awe very powerfully. They are stoic and respectful, and the way that they approach corporate worship communicates very clearly that God is holy, holy, holy. They look and behave as if they are attending the Day of Atonement service week after week.

On the other side of the spectrum is a group that expresses joy and gratitude very powerfully. They are bubbly and excited and the way that they approach corporate worship communicates very clearly that they delight in their Heavenly Father and that they believe that He delights in

them. They look and behave as if they are attending the Feast of Trumpets week after week. I can only imagine what would happen if one of them ever got a hold of a trumpet...

Let me say something this morning loud and clear: We need BOTH of those groups in this congregation! And both of those groups need to learn from each other. The joy group needs to learn the time and place for sobriety and the sobriety group needs to learn the time and place for joy! Both of those responses need to be a part of our worship vocabulary.

We'll never get the balance just right, but let's resolve to try. Because our God is a deep and wide and awesome God, and He is worthy of worship that is marked by appropriate breadth! Amen?

And finally, in light of all that we have seen thus far, I want to make sure that we all learn this elementary lesson:

6. Worship matters

In fact, we could go a step further and say that worship is the WHOLE POINT. Why did God save the Israelites?

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, **so that they may worship me.** (Exodus 8:1 ESV)

The Israelites were saved SO AS TO BE WORSHIPERS!

Why did they need atonement? So that they could draw near to God and WORSHIP! Atonement was like the ticket to enter into the stadium. It would be confusing if a man bought a ticket to the Blue Jays game and then proceeded to walk back to his apartment to watch the game on the tv. You purchase the ticket SO AS TO ENTER!³ Atonement was necessary because worship is necessary.

³ Pastor Paul Carter used this analogy in the Wednesday morning preaching workshop.

Why did they need to learn about holiness? So that they could approach closer in their worship! They weren't content sitting in the nose bleeds – they wanted to draw near SO AS TO WORSHIP! Holiness was necessary because worship is necessary.

Why did they need a priesthood? To lead them in worship! The priests were like the ushers at the stadium making sure that everyone made their way to their respective positions. They were like the announcers giving leadership and instructions to the gathered Israelites. Instructions for what? Instructions for WORSHIP!

Worship is the point! Worship is the purpose! Worship is EVERYTHING!

Therefore, corporate worship was THE big rock in EVERY Israelite's calendar. They understood that before they were farmers, or fathers, or husbands, they were primarily and fundamentally WORSHIPERS. Their weekly calendar revolved around worship. Their annual calendar revolved around worship.

As we conclude this morning, I want to leave you with a question: What lies at the centre of your calendar? What is the big rock that gets written in first? What is the unmovable, irreplaceable, non-negotiable priority in your life?

You were made to worship. You were made to follow Christ; to rest in his provision; to remember God's faithfulness; to anticipate His coming; to respond to His character; to breath in His goodness in corporate worship and to breath out His praise as you go forth into the world.

We learned all of that by a quick glance at the Israelite calendar in our passage this morning. THAT is a calendar that says clearly and unambiguously: "Worship MATTERS!" That is a calendar that says: "Praising God is my priority."

What does your calendar say?

You were made to worship. You were saved to worship. Is that the cry of your heart? If not, then ask God to change you. Let your life – let this church – be about ONE thing above all else: Glorifying God as we enjoy Him FOREVER! Amen? To that end, let's pray together.