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The Grain Offering **Leviticus 2:1-16**

Intro: In our last study, we looked at the Book of Leviticus in light of its immediate literary and historical context: the events of the Book of Exodus. God made a covenant with Israel at Mt Sinai which the law Israel had to obey as being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Since it would be impossible for Israel to live up to the requirements of the law, sacrifices were established to provide for the inevitable violations that would certainly occur. No one could perfectly obey the law, so sin had to be dealt with through sacrifice. This is the immediate context of Leviticus but there is another, larger context that this Book can be understood in. Leviticus does more than just answer questions raised by its immediate literary and historical context. It also casts a vision that is rooted in the Bible's larger story; more specifically, in the story of creation.

There have been some fascinating developments in biblical studies over the past several years that focus on the thematic tapestries found within the Scriptures. Take the exodus, for instance. We're all familiar with the story. But, what we may not be familiar with is the concept that the exodus of Israel out of Egypt is just one of many exoduses described in the Bible. The first was Adam and Eve's exodus out of Eden – moving away from God's presence. This tragic exodus was made even worse by the world-wide dispersion of humanity after the Tower of Babel incident – humanity became further removed from God. There's Abram's exodus out of Ur, then out of Egypt – drawing closer to God. There's Lot's exodus out of Sodom – voluntary, but under great persuasion. Then there's the big Exodus, which we think is the BIG one but it's actually merely a shadow of the ultimate exodus, where individual humans are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into God's glorious kingdom of light through the divine person and sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, who brings us back into God's glorious presence.

We find a similar echoing theme in our text. In fact, God's purpose for His people in Leviticus is in many ways a return to His purpose for humanity in creation. This is seen in terms of separation, blessing and calling. In creation, the Lord separates things into their proper place to bring order to

the world (light/dark, firmament/ waters, dry land/ sea, etc.). At the height of creation, He makes Adam and Eve, bringing them into this ordered world and blessing them in many ways: 1) by shining His favor on them to make them fruitful, 2) placing them in a lush garden where all their physical needs are met, 3) giving them a Sabbath rest and, best of all, 4) walking with them as their God. Now, along with these blessings is a calling. God has created them in His image and they're to reflect this divine image in the earth. This means they are to represent Him as they rule over the earth in a way that reflects how He rules over it: with justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love. Their mission is to fill the earth with this kingdom.

Leviticus casts this same vision for God's people. In it, the Lord once again brings order to the world by separating things into their proper place and calling His people to do the same. He separates His people from the rest of the world and promises to bless them as He did Adam and Eve: 1) by shining His favor on them to make them fruitful, 2) placing them in a lush land where all their physical needs will be met, 3) giving them a Sabbath rest and, best of all, 4) walking with them as their God. And, as in creation, the blessings are again accompanied by a calling. He has separated Israel from the peoples of the earth so that they might reflect His image to the world: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (19:2). The Israelites are now those who are to represent the Lord in this earth, fulfilling the purpose the Lord had for humanity in creation, showing the rest of the world what that purpose is, how to keep it and how to experience the abundant life God originally intended for His creation. In short, Israel wasn't just to be a signpost pointing back to Eden, they were to be a manifestation of it and to be a people who extend Eden's borders to every corner of the earth.

Now, some may say, "This interesting but it's just OT." True, but this is still God's purpose for His people today. Did not Paul tell the Corinthians, "Come out from among them and be separate..." (II Cor 6:17); quoting an OT concept? Haven't NT believers been blessed with fruitfulness (fruit of the Spirit - Gal 6:22-23), promised to have our physical needs met (Phil 4:19), given rest in Christ (Heb 4:3a) and, not only does the Lord walk with us (Heb 13:5) but we have the privilege of following Him (Mk 8:34) and even abiding in Him (John 15:4). In the same way, these blessings are accompanied by a calling – to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). This is a life-long calling for the believer but, while Adam and Eve

failed in the first attempt and Israel failed miserably in the next; we have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to not only conform us to Christ's image but enable us to share it as well.

As we study the descriptions of the major sacrifices listed in ch 1-7, we should keep in mind that the sacrificial system was given by God as His invitation to His people to meet with Him and worship Him. As noted, God gave Moses His law for His people but He knew His people would transgress His law. In fact, they did it before Moses could even get down off the mountain. But, instead of giving up on His people, God provided a means of atonement for their sin so they could come into His presence. The sacrificial system was that means of atonement.

Ch1 describes the first type of sacrifice – the burnt offering. Our text describes the grain offering. These 2 offerings had similarities and significant differences. Both had to be of the best quality, both were offered by fire and both resulted in a pleasing aroma to the Lord; meaning the Lord was pleased with the offering. But the burnt offering was an animal while the grain offering consisted of cooked or uncooked grain. The burnt offering was a blood offering, the grain offering was not. All of the burnt offering was consumed on the altar but only part of the grain offering was burned on the altar and the rest was eaten by the priests.

While both the burnt and grain offerings gave the Israelite an opportunity to express a total commitment to the Lord, the burnt offering contained an aspect of atonement while the grain offering did not. The main idea behind the grain offering was worship. It was also suggestive of our service to God. The grain being offered was the work of men's hands, of the fruit of the ground, the result of cultivation, manufacture and preparation; the symbol of service offered.

This offering may seem strange but there were 3 main reasons for it: 1) Grains and "produce" are of great necessity and benefit to man and it's appropriate to honor God with such things. 2) Even the poorest could bring a grain offering and God wanted to open the door for the poor to worship Him with offerings. 3) This also brought helpful and necessary grain and other produce for the priests. Since the priests represented God, they had a right to partake of certain sacrifices offered to God. This offering apparently provided the main source of income for the priesthood.

Again, the main purpose of the grain offering was worship. God provides the produce of the land. God's people worship Him as the One who provides all good things ([Jam 1:17](#)). He is the Lord, the King, and in bringing Him their gifts His people were expressing their allegiance to Him. As they brought the sacrifice, they were thanking God for His provision, dedicating their harvest to Him and symbolizing their dedication to Him. That's what God's people do in worship today. We bring a gift to God as an act of dedication to Him – "God, I dedicate myself and my possessions to You." We not only feel gratitude; we show it. We not only talk about our dedication to God; we demonstrate it.

Dedication to God calls for gratitude. Our giving to God is an act of gratitude. We know that what we have comes from God, so in giving to God we're thanking and praising God for His gift of daily bread. That's what the Israelites were doing in this offering. God had given them all that they had and He told them to bring part of the produce as an offering to Him. Are you grateful for what you have? The ungrateful have forgotten that God's the One who allowed them to acquire it. They might think they've earned it but it was God who gave them the strength and opportunity to earn it. All that we have comes from God. If we're dedicated to Him, we'll be grateful.

Dedication to God also calls for giving our best. 5 times in ch2, the grain to be offered is referred to as fine flour, or finely ground flour. The phrase is used in the OT to describe the finest of flour, milled exclusively from the inner kernels of wheat. Though it was available to all, it was expensive and considered a luxury item, to be used especially for entertaining important guests. God's people were to bring only the best flour to God. They were also instructed to add frankincense to their offering, which was also expensive. Now, if they couldn't afford frankincense, they could bake their flour into unleavened bread. The point is, if we're dedicated to God, we won't offer something second-rate; we'll bring the best, even if it's just our best efforts. If we have the funds to get the best, we'll spend it; and if we don't have the funds, we'll spend the time to make our gift the best we can make it.

Remember, God gave these instructions to Israel while they were in the wilderness. They weren't growing anything! They were nomads in the wilderness, not farmers. Thus, grain for fine flour was even more rare and

valuable and so was the olive oil that was to be poured on the grain offering. Some have speculated that Israel may have pulled from their seed reserves, what they were planning to plant once they arrived in Canaan. If so, giving that seed grain was an act of faith; they were trusting God to provide for them when they got to the Promise Land. They were willing to deplete their reserves in worship of their King and then trust Him to provide to cover the deficit. Dedication to God calls for giving our best.

Both v4 and 11 say that God didn't allow any leaven (yeast) in the grain offering. As the burnt offering was to be without blemish, so the grain offering was to be without leaven. Why? Sometimes the ingredients of sacrifices carried meaning by association and leaven was associated with corruption. The process of leavening involves fermentation, which is a form of decay and as such, is related to death. In Leviticus, the realm of holiness, or cleanliness, is the realm of life and the realm of the profane, or uncleanness, is the realm of death. God's people were to abide in the realm of holiness, or life and to avoid the realm of the profane, or death. Certainly they were to stay away from the realm of death in worship. Sure, sacrificial animals were killed in worship but their deaths graphically demonstrated the spiritual principle that sin leads to death. As for leaven (yeast), it was associated with decay and death, so it was to be kept away from worship.

Leaven is associated with corruption throughout the Bible. When we worship, we must also exclude corruption. The Bible is clear in teaching that God's people cannot offer acceptable worship to God if the way they're living is not acceptable to God. Sinful living or thinking is leaven, it is corruption. The prophet Samuel told King Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). This means don't come to worship and make a show of being right with God only to leave worship and go back to sin. That's corruption and to offer right worship we have to clean up corruption.

Of course, this doesn't mean sinners aren't welcome in worship. We're all sinners and we gather for worship to seek God, to confess our sins and seek His forgiveness for sin and His power over sin. The difference between those who offer right worship and those who don't isn't that right worshippers aren't sinners. The difference is that right worshippers know they are sinners, they know they need God and they know they need atonement and salvation that only comes from God in Christ. That was the whole purpose of the sacrificial system: atonement for sinners so that they

might offer worthy worship. Worthy worship excludes corruption.

Now, v11 also prohibits honey from being offered. This was likely because honey was the favorite thing to sacrifice to pagan gods and God didn't want to be worshipped in the same way false, pagan gods were worshipped. Leaven can make things artificially sour (sourdough) and honey can make things artificially sweet. God didn't want either of these things in worship. When we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2), God wants us to come just as we are, without artificially making ourselves out to be more or less than we actually are.

Now, while leaven and honey were prohibited, salt was specifically required. In fact, God mentions it 3 times in v13! Salt was an important part of the offering because it spoke of purity, of preservation and of expense. Every sacrifice offered to God should be pure, should be enduring and should cost something. Salt purifies and it preserves. It will slow or virtually stop the normal process of rot in meat. It's the nature of flesh to spoil but salt-cured meats stay good. Salt also spoke of friendship. According to ancient custom, a bond of friendship was established through the eating of salt. It was said that once you had eaten a man's salt, you were his friend for life. God wanted every sacrifice to be a reminder of Israel's relationship with Him. That's why He refers to it as the salt of the covenant of your God.

All the laws God gave His people were given in the context of relationship. God established a relationship with the Hebrews when He made a covenant with Abraham and He was keeping the promises of that covenant when He delivered Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt. God entered into another covenant relationship with His people at Mt. Sinai and the sacrificial system maintained that relationship. The salt represented that covenant. When Israelites added salt to their grain offering, they remembered their covenant relationship with their King. They also knew that, as a preservative, the salt symbolized the continuation of their covenant relationship with God.

The fact that God excluded leaven and honey from offerings but commanded salt be included shows that God wants sincerity in both our worship and service, not things made artificially sweet. Charles Spurgeon once said, "There is a kind of molasses godliness which I can never stomach." Sadly, that weak and worthless form of Christianity is alive and

thriving in our world today. It's a cotton-candy type of Christianity: it looks amazing, tastes wonderful and is very appealing – but it has no substance. At the first sign of trouble, it melts away and disappears. That describes the majority of what passes for Christianity in our country today. It's as wide as the continent but it's only an inch deep.

The last section (v12-16) describes the offering of the firstfruits. This offering was not to be offered in the same manner as the grain offering. Yet, the idea of the firstfruits was important. The first of the harvest and the first of the livestock belonged to the Lord. This could be considered risky as the land may not yield much more produce and the cow or ewe might not give birth again – regardless, the first still belonged to God. But the Lord promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn, which was a sign of the worshipper's faith (Prov 3:9-10). And, although the grain heads of the offering came from the worshipper's field, the oil and frankincense made the sacrifice costlier.

How does our text relate to Jesus Christ? Surely Jesus is echoing this passage when He refers to Himself as the Bread of Life (Jn 6:32-35) or the grain of wheat that must die if it's to produce much grain (Jn 12:23-25). But there are greater parallels in the life of Jesus that reflect the spiritual principles of our text. Namely, Jesus is our example of showing gratitude. The grain offering was given in gratitude for God's provision and we constantly see Jesus giving thanks throughout the 4 Gospels. Also, Jesus is our example of dedication. In Heb 10:6-7, Jesus declares, "I have come...to do Your will, oh God." This statement expresses the heart of the sacrificial system. It has never been the offering itself that pleased God but what the offering represented: penitence for sin, a desire for God's forgiveness and dedication to God in the heart of the worshipper. This is what pleases God.

But Jesus doesn't merely example dedication for us, He makes our dedication possible. Paul wrote about dedicating ourselves to God and he used the verbiage of presenting an offering to God (Rom 6:13). That's a picture of dedicating ourselves to God and Paul wrote this after emphasizing that our old self was crucified with Christ and now we have a new life in Christ (4). In other words, just as God's power raised Jesus from the dead, His power enables us to live a new way. Thus, Paul exhorts followers of Jesus to consider themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (11). Jesus gives us new life. How are we able to please God by dedicating

ourselves to Him? We can do that because Jesus has made us new! Before Jesus, nothing in us wanted to be dedicated to do God's will. But Jesus has put to death the old self of sin and He has given us a new life that delights to do God's will.

Atonement for sin isn't mentioned in ch2 because it has already been achieved in the whole burnt offering in ch1. The order is important. Before we can please God with our dedication, our sin must be taken away. We have to already be the kind of people who want to be dedicated to God and that's what Jesus does in us. He makes our dedication possible.

Finally, Jesus is the firstfruits of our resurrection ([1 Cor 15:20](#)). Here, Paul uses Levitical language to express the fact that the resurrection of Jesus is the first of a great harvest of souls who will be gathered in heaven for worship. Can you picture what worship is like in heaven? God's people singing honestly and enthusiastically, in perfect harmony and perfect unity and with appropriate gusto, their voices joined in giving praise to God. What a glorious event. By comparison, our worship falls short of heaven's worship and rightfully so. Here, we see in a mirror dimly, but in heaven we will see (and be seen) face to face. Here, our faith is mixed with doubts and our holiness is compromised by sin. In heaven, doubt and sin don't exist!

Only Jesus worshipped perfectly on earth. Then He died as the sacrifice for our sins. So when we put our faith in Him, He forgives our sin, reconciles us to God and gives us new and eternal life. Then He rose from the grave and we who know Him will be in heaven with Him. Both here on earth and there in heaven, Jesus is the center of our worship. 😊