

Grateful Giving From the Ground Up

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[0 : 00] So we come now to our Bible reading, so please do take up a Bible and turn to Leviticus chapter 2. Leviticus chapter 2. And later in the service Stephen Ballingall will be preaching to us from this book, which is pretty much very neglected by most churches, most people today it seems.

It's a wonderful book. And we're going to be looking at chapter 2 this evening. And we're going to read the whole of chapter 2 now. So Leviticus chapter 2.

Hear the word of the Lord. When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil.

You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it. When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil or unleavened wafers smeared with oil.

And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour unleavened mixed with oil. You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it.

[1 : 44] It is a grain offering. And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to the Lord.

And when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar.

A food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the Lord's food offerings.

No grain offering that you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven. For you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the Lord.

As an offering of first fruits, you may bring them to the Lord, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma. You shall season all your grain offerings with salt.

[2 : 52] You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering. With all your offerings, you shall offer salt.

If you offer a grain offering of first fruits to the Lord, you shall offer for the grain offering of your first fruits, fresh ears, roasted with fire, crushed new grain.

And you shall put oil on it and lay frankincense on it. It is a grain offering and the priest shall burn as its memorial portion, some of the crushed grain and some of the oil with all of its frankincense.

It is a food offering to the Lord. Well, amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, evening all.

Please do keep your Bibles open at Leviticus chapter 2 as we go through this chapter together. I know many of you weren't here last week given it's the holiday season.

[3 : 56] But last week we saw that Leviticus is all about relationship with the Lord. In this strange and unfamiliar book full of rules, rituals, and laws that feel foreign to us, they're all given by the Lord to enable relationship between the holy God and his sinful people.

And the way the whole book is structured emphasizes that as it is mountain-shaped with the day of atonement in chapter 16 as the peak of the mountain when all of Israel are made at one with the Lord, reconciled with him.

And because of that, atonement is the central theme that connects the whole message. Israel was learning how, despite their sin, they could be at one with, at peace with the Lord their God.

And the day of atonement is like this seismic event that reverberates through the rest of the book. It has a huge immediate impact and then ripples out, moving its way outward.

As this ripple effect moves out, it impacts different areas of life for the Israelites, of how being at one with the Lord changes everything. And this week we'll see how it impacts the realm of our work.

[5 : 16] In these three opening offerings we're looking at, the burnt offering last week, the grain offering this evening, and the peace offering next Sunday, we are being invited in to worship the Lord of life.

And we'll see what normal Christian life looks like in the process. We're given a picture of how the Israelites were to approach and have fellowship with the Lord their God, seeing three different angles on the same picture.

And as we do so, we see the pattern of normal Christian life displayed for us to take joy from. As we devote ourselves to our heavenly Father, because he has been gracious enough to bring us to himself.

That's what our offering is doing this evening. It's displaying the total surrender of the work of our hands to our covenant king, who has graciously promised himself to us.

Put very simply, we worship as we work. And that's a message that we desperately need to hear. That as you work, you worship the Lord your God.

[6 : 24] That blesses our working lives with such great dignity, as we do so not at the pleasure of our earthly employers, or so that we can get a paycheck, or so that we can pay for that nice holiday, or so that we can be fulfilled ourselves.

But rather, we serve at the pleasure of the Lord our God, our King, sending up a pleasing aroma as we work for Him.

Because the Lord looks at your life as a whole, not in parts, and He wants everything devoted to Him, including the way you work. How much do we need to hear that?

In a world where our work is valued so poorly, causes such grief and stress, and so often it just feels like you're putting in massive amounts of effort for a very little result.

But our work, our normal, painful, and frustrating as it may be, brings joy to our Heavenly Father, as He accepts our work as tribute to His Lordship, and He uses it for His kingdom work.

[7 : 35] And this evening, we will see that. We'll see that we worship as we work, as we take part in grateful giving from the ground up. With that in mind, we'll look at the second offering, the grain offering described in our reading, chapter 2.

And we've got three R's again as we go through this. What we'll do this evening is look at the ritual, the reason, and then the reminder that this offering gives. The ritual, reason, then reminder. And the ritual is pretty straightforward.

It has five steps to this offering, with a bit of variety and creativity permitted within for the offerer to decide as they see fit. But before we get there, I just want to say it's tempting for us to treat these descriptions as like just reading the recipe in a cookbook.

Last week, it was meat. This week, it's a vegetable barbecue, which does not sound good. But this was actually like very vivid worship.

This was worship that engaged all the senses. You felt the fine flour in your hand. You smelled the perfume. You saw the priest throwing it on the fire, hearing the flames engulf the offering, feeling the heat emanating from the fire.

[8 : 44] And the priest would be tasting the lovely bread that was offered. It was tangible. It was vivid, full of life. And you were given physical reminders of spiritual realities as you took part.

So, step one. You bring your offering to the tabernacle, ready to be offered in an act of worship to the Lord. And the Israelite could be quite creative in how they did this.

Verses 1 to 3 speak of how to bring an uncooked offering of flour to the Lord. And this would be grain that you've planted, harvested, and ground down through your own hard work.

Verses 4 to 10 speak of cooked or baked offerings. If it's been cooked in an oven, a griddle, or a pan, presenting something like flatbreads or wafers or fried bread, something like that.

And verses 15 and 16 speak of the offering of the first fruits, which is a branch of the grain offering, bringing the first part of the harvest, fresh grain, which has been roasted with fire.

[9 : 47] So you bring your offering to the tent of meeting, and it's to be made of verse 1, fine flour, quite like a semolina flour, if you know your flours. A fine, silky flour that feels lovely in your hands, that is the best of the best.

Step 2, you place oil and frankincense, the Chanel No. 5 of its day, on the offering. The oil seems to be mixed in with the uncooked offering in verses 1 to 3, but it's smeared or poured or mixed again in verses 4 to 10.

And these differences don't seem to be theologically significant, but are simply the best way to combine the oil with the different kinds of offerings. And those two things together, the oil and the frankincense, emphasize the richness of the offering.

These elements weren't that easy to get your hands on in the middle of the desert. And again, were the best, the finest, that Israel could offer. Step 3, once you've brought your fine flour or baked bread with your oil and frankincense to the tent of meeting, the priest then, verse 2, he takes a handful of the fine flour and oil with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as a memorial portion on the altar.

So the priest takes a good handful of the flour and oil, of the bread and oil, and then all of the frankincense, and he throws it on the altar, burning it up. And the difference there in him taking all of the frankincense, not just part of it, this rich perfume, is because, well, as nice as Chanel No. 5 may smell, it's not the kind of thing you want near your mouth.

[11:23] You don't go spraying it on your dinner. But this perfume would have added a lovely aroma as it was burned. And this is, as verse 2 said, that phrase, a memorial portion.

What is that? Well, it's a token offering that communicates that the whole offering belongs to the Lord, but in his kindness, he's willing to accept only a small portion of it.

It's acknowledging that the whole offering belongs to him. Step 4, this sends up a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Pleasing him is the aim.

It's always the aim in this. And to reaffirm what we saw last week, this isn't play acting. The Lord was genuinely pleased and took joy in his people when he saw them devote the work of their hands to him, pledging their allegiance to him.

And finally, step 5, the priest keeps the rest and eats it in the courts of the tabernacle. Verse 3 says that it's a holy part of the offering, meaning that it's set apart for the specific use of the priests.

[12:28] So in this ritual, you would bring your flower or your bed, you'd mix oil with it in some fashion, the priest takes a handful of it and throws it on the altar as the memorial portion. This sends up the pleasing aroma and then the priest eats the rest.

Simple. It's a fairly straightforward offering, one which was built into Israel's calendar. Often it would be offered daily as a constant reminder that the work of their hands was every day to be devoted to the Lord their God.

So what is the reason for this offering? Why did the Israelites take part in this act of worship? Well, it has one core purpose and another one which flows from it.

The core purpose is that this is a tribute of allegiance and thankfulness to your king. The purpose that flows from that is that the king provides for his kingdom work through your offering.

So firstly, and really at the heart of this offering, this is a tribute to your king. The grain offering is a *minha* offering. That's a Hebrew word I've learned this week.

[13:35] I'm probably butchering the pronunciation wildly. I've only ever read it. I've never heard it. A *minha* offering. That's the exact word we translate as grain at the start of it. And it's a specific term used for people bringing tributes to their king.

It was a way of lower rulers showing their allegiance and devotion to their king. They were giving them an offering saying, I'm yours. I'm committed to you. And I, in everything I do, I'm at your service.

That's why many commentators, as they speak about this offering, they call it not the grain offering, but the tribute offering. To show what the offering is doing rather than what it consists of. This would have been really clear to and in the mind of the original readers of Leviticus, reading or listening in the original Hebrew.

A tribute offering was a regular act that was done right across their culture. There are a few examples of these tributes in the Bible. So, for example, in Genesis 32, Jacob, before he's about to see Esau and speak with him, he sends forward tribute gifts to Esau, hoping to appease him to prepare for their meeting together.

And in 2 Samuel 8, once the Moabites and Ammonites have been conquered by Israel, taken over by Israel, they send tribute offerings to King David, their new king, to show that their loyalty is to him and none other.

[15:00] These tributes functioned as a pledge of allegiance to their king. They wouldn't cause them harm, but they were going to remember their relationship, their covenant, the terms on which they operate.

And they were recommitting to that every time they gave their tribute. I'm still yours. I'm still with you. I'm committed to you. And even in our culture, when Queen Elizabeth ascended to take the throne in 1953, our coronation then, she received gifts from other nations like apparently she received a horse, she received ponies, fine food, and extravagant jewelry, and many other gifts from the Commonwealth nations as each one of them lined up to pay tribute to her as their new queen.

They were loyal to her. So this isn't just a nice food gift for them to enjoy like sending along a fruit basket, but this grain tribute symbolizes far more.

It's a commitment of yourself to your ruler, the one you belong to. In this offering, you're getting the gift of your labor itself as well as the fruit of the labor.

Making fine flour wasn't as simple as just driving down to the big Tesco and picking up a bag. You had to work hard for it. Digging, sowing, watering, waiting, weeding, harvesting, gathering, and then the hard work of grinding it down with the massive hand-operated millstones.

[16:31] The flower they brought to the tabernacle was the fruit of all that labor, that labor dedicated to the worship of the Lord their God. The labor itself, as well as the fruit of the labor, was dedicated to him in worship.

We can sometimes get our bearings wrong in the Bible and think that worshiping the Lord in the Old Testament era was just a locational or a Sabbath-based activity.

And now that in the New Testament in Christ, our whole lives are offered up to him in worship. But clearly from this offering, the Lord wanted his people to worship him outside the Sabbath and away from the tabernacle.

He wanted the whole work of their hands to be done entirely in servant-like devotion to him, the king who has saved them from the house of slavery.

As they dug out the earth to plant seeds, as they fought off pests from their crops, and as they worked by the sweat of their brow in harvest time, they were doing so in worship of the Lord their God.

[17:36] They worshipped as they worked. It didn't suddenly just become worship the minute they crossed the threshold of the tabernacle. It was worship from planting to praising as the Lord's hands stretched out even into the most mundane activities of their day-to-day working life.

In doing all that and committing their work as worship to the Lord, the Israelite was expressing allegiance to their king. It was an outward expression of their inward faith.

And secondly, flowing out from this being a tribute to the king, there is provision for his kingdom work. The king provides for his kingdom work. So as you dedicate yourself to the Lord, you commit to providing for his priorities, to taking on his cares, his aims.

The priests were from the tribe of Levites, and when the land was apportioned, they weren't given a portion of the promised land that they could farm with. They didn't have a place that they could make a living from because they were to be entirely set apart for their service to the Lord, mediating his presence to his people.

Their job was far too important for anything else to get in the way of it. Since they did that, they depended on the offerings of the people to live, which is why most of this flour or bread is given directly to them, to the priests.

[19:03] If it wasn't, the priests either wouldn't have anything to eat, or they would be forced to sell themselves as labor to feed their families, unable to do the duties they were called to do.

And Paul in the New Testament uses this as justification to pay your ministers a decent wage. In 1 Corinthians 9, he comments that since the priests were fed by the giving of the people, so should the church today provide for those whose lives are set apart for the gospel.

We are all responsible for providing for our ministers, ensuring that they can dedicate themselves entirely to the work God has given them. And the Lord actually uses that as a barometer for your spiritual health.

If the priests were well supplied, it was a sign that the people were taking their covenant obligations seriously. And if the priests were going hungry, the people's priorities were way off.

It might not be the first thing you think of for a judge of your church's spiritual health, is it?

Obviously, there are caveats to add. If your minister suddenly turns up to church in a Bentley and has a private jet and a holiday home in Barbados, there might be a problem.

[20:16] But a church's giving is a good indicator of its spiritual health, especially at a time when there's more pressure than ever on our finances. Those whose lives are dedicated to preaching the

gospel, they should be able to get their needs met within the covenant community.

But as that happens, it's an expression of the people's commitment to their king that he is the one who has saved them and his work is what they are prioritizing.

The Lord is teaching his people that commitment to the king means commitment to his kingdom work. And what does this offering remind us of?

What was the Lord reminding his people of as they devoted the fruit of their labors to him? And here we're going to be zoning in on verses 11 to 13. These quite curious instructions we have regarding yeast, honey, and salt.

And we see here that as the people gave this offering, the Lord was reminding them of his covenant with them. That he is their God, they are his people, and he doesn't want anything to corrupt or ruin that.

[21 : 26] It's a reminder of the great grace of God that he has committed himself to his people. So verse 11, no grain offering that you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven.

For you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the Lord. No leaven or yeast and no honey is to be in your offerings.

And the reason for that isn't spelled out directly, but we can work it out from a couple of clues. Yeast is spoken of both positively and negatively in the Bible, so it isn't intrinsically wrong in itself.

But what is wrong with this and what it shares with honey is that it ferments and decays when it's burned. It would cause decay and corruption to be present on the altar as offerings are sent up to the Lord.

That's why verse 12 says a different thing entirely. It says that you can offer yeast and honey in the first fruit offering because the first fruit offering doesn't get offered on the altar.

[22 : 29] It's not going to get burnt up. It's specific to what happens on the altar as yeast and honey decay as they're burned and break down, corrupting and making the offering, the whole offering, less pristine, giving God something that's far from its best.

That decay, that corruption is held in contrast to what comes next as the main reminder that God is giving his people is found in verse 13 and this is what he doesn't want being corrupted.

Verse 13, you shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offerings. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.

He's really emphatic about that, isn't he? Always put salt in it. Don't forget to put salt in it. Always offer salt. All because of that phrase, the salt of the covenant. And again, this takes a practice that was common at the time and the Lord uses that to remind them of his commitment to them.

When two parties made a commitment, an agreement in the ancient world, they would exchange salt and they would swear by the salt to say that they would obey this forever with punishments to follow if either party broke covenant.

[23 : 48] We do our own version of that in our culture too, whether it's exchanging contracts or exchanging rings or a firm shake of the hand. This is just ancient Israel's cultural way of expressing the same truths.

And the reason it's salt specifically is that salt is a preservative. So permanence was what they were expressing in doing so. The salt of the covenant appears elsewhere in the Bible.

So in Numbers chapter 18, it says that the Lord makes an everlasting covenant of salt with the priests that he will provide for them, which we see in our passage this evening. Or in 2 Chronicles 13, the king of Judah says that the kingship is given to King David and his future offspring by an everlasting covenant of salt.

And we know that the kingship was a forever kingship for David, promised throughout all generations. So permanence is the point here.

Salt is a preservative as opposed to yeast and honey, which decays. And also remember the context that this comes in. The grain offering is one given by a subject to their king to reaffirm and renew their loyalty and commitment to the king.

[25 : 06] So with that in mind, putting the salt in every grain offering, it's a reminder to both of you. Reminding yourself that you've committed yourself to the Lord and you're reminding him too.

Reminding him that he's committed himself to you. His covenant with them is renewed and reaffirmed every time they give because each act of giving is acknowledging the reality of their covenant relationship.

The Lord in his grace allows us to remind him of his covenant commitments to us. Feels quite scandalous, doesn't it? We get to remind God of what he's promised to us.

That's why in our communion hymn we sing, Lord, remember me. As well as singing, Lord, remember him, remember Christ. We're calling on the Lord to remember his covenant with us, with you and I sitting in the room.

A covenant of salt, a forever covenant. And you're reminding him that you have promised yourself to him. We, with the Lord, our God, are calling each other to remembrance over his promises to us.

[26 : 22] This offering reminds us of our place before God. It asserts his kingly rule and affords us great dignity in our work as the Lord takes the ordinary labors of our hands and accepts them as fitting tribute to him.

So what was this offering doing for the original hearers, the Israelites who were given this as a free will offering that they can bring to the Lord? Well, the grain offering, as we've said, is the committal of your work and the fruit of your work to the Lord, who is your king.

So as the Israelites gave this offering, they were doing a few different things. They were showing that the Lord has lordship over every area of their lives, but specifically in the realm of their labor. They are remembering their status as humble servants of the king who owe everything to him. And they're contributing towards the kingdom work that was essential to their relationship with the Lord flourishing.

But let's turn that on its head because this is a real two-way relationship. This wasn't play acting, but they are engaging with the Lord of heaven and earth in a genuinely meaningful way.

[27 : 34] So instead of what the Israelites were doing, let's ask what God was doing for them in this. Well, he is giving the work of their hands incredible dignity.

As they work, they worship him. He's reminding them of his covenant with them to graciously to be their God and them his people.

And he is providing for his kingdom work which blesses the Israelites. It blesses the whole community. As much as the offerer appears to be the main player in this, the Lord is doing far more as he gives dignity to and accepts the worship-filled work of his people.

What a privilege for the Israelite that they could take part in this act of worship that brings dignity and blessing to the work of their hands. And what does this teach us today?

How does this ancient offering apply to us in 21st century Glasgow? Well, this teaches us that our working lives belong to the Lord for he is our covenant king.

[28 : 44] We worship as we work. And that turns the whole idea of our culture's working life on its head. Because the pandemic has changed how most of our culture thinks about work.

Recently, many industries have been facing the great resignation as millions of workers across the world, having had time to consider their lives over the pandemic, have been so utterly unsatisfied and unfulfilled in their work that they just want out, even if they don't have another job to go to.

And it's not over. According to the World Economic Forum, 20% of workers, 20% of workers are going to hand in their notice this year alone because of just how unsatisfied and disenfranchised they feel at their work.

Back in the 90s, Oasis asked, is it worth the aggravation to find yourself a job when there's nothing worth working for? And many in our generation would hear that and say, no.

Our culture isn't entirely consistent, it holds up different views of work, but it either tends to go down the route of being something that you just have to do, purely a means to an end. That's on one side of the spectrum, and the other end holds up work fairly highly.

[30 : 07] But it only tends to do so when you are doing your passion, or you're doing something that fulfills you. And even then, it's always to fit around what you like outside of work, making way for everything you'd like to do socially.

That's partly why so many people are determined to work from home now, isn't it? So that work can fit around their hobbies rather than the other way around. That's the culture around us, that's the air we breathe.

On the one end, cynical, grumpy work, and on the other, self-centered, individualistic, self-pleasing work. But Leviticus too wants to take those attitudes and smash them to pieces.

Its message for us today is that your working lives and the fruit of your working lives belong to your king. Your work is not a pointless means to an end or all about you, but your working life is all about pleasing him.

because God looks at the part of your life marked work and he says, mine. I want that. The work you do Monday to Friday, nine to five, is spiritually significant.

[31 : 28] We as Christians don't have different compartments of our lives where this is spiritual and that isn't. We might think that our Sundays are spiritual, but our work on spreadsheets isn't. Your singing is spiritual, but changing the nappies isn't.

But the Lord says that everything is spiritual. Everything in your life is spiritual and is to be set apart for his worship alone, devoted to him.

I don't know if you've seen the film Chariots of Fire, but it's the inspiring tale of the Christian athlete Eric Liddell who won gold at the 1924 Paris Olympics. It's brilliant and it's best known for that slow-mo scene of him and his team running along the West Sands Beach at St.

Andrew's. You know the tune. It's absolutely amazing. But in that film, and this is very much true to his life, he sees his work as an athlete as his spiritual worship to the Lord.

As an athlete when he's running on the track. This was what he said about his running. I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast.

[32 : 42] And when I run, I feel his pleasure. He understood that his whole life was an offering to the Lord, sending up a pleasing aroma to him.

As he, in the words of Romans 12, was presenting his body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

There is no area of your life that God isn't interested in. He considers your working life as something that he desires in worship of himself.

And just think about that with me for a minute. The Lord God, maker of heaven and earth, the high king of heaven, desires the labor of your hands.

God, how much dignity is your work afforded by that? By the fact that the Lord, the God you are at one with, desires it in worship for himself.

[33 : 48] He sees your work as something that belongs to him and may be offered up to him in worship. True fulfillment and work will only be found in consecrating it for him, set apart for worshipping him.

So as you go into work tomorrow, as you spend all morning replying to those emails or you're dealing with those difficult people, you're helping construct that building, doing the dishes, you're caring for your patient, or you're raising your child or anything in between.

Worship as you work. work. The Lord wants that in worship of himself. He wants all of you and he desires the labor of your hands to be devoted entirely to him.

So worship as you work and worship with the fruit of your work. When it comes on how to give of the fruit of our labor, verses 14 to 16 are really clear.

give the first fruits of what you have to the Lord. When the harvest comes in, give the first bit, the best bit, to him.

[35 : 07] Over the past few months, we've all been forced to consider what our priorities are financially, given how much all of our various bills have been rising. I've been feeling that anyway. There's been real difficulty in that, and it may have caused real struggle for you or for people you know.

But the question that this offering is asking us is when money is tight, what is the first thing to go? What is the one outgoing that you wouldn't dream of taking away?

When the bills get higher as they are, will we prioritize paying tribute to our king? As we give to him, the Lord is reminded of the relationship that we share.

As that money is transferred every month out of our bank account, or as we put what we have in the offering basket, he is reminded that we treat him as our king. That whatever happens, his claim on our lives, because of how much he's given us, comes before anything else.

the fuel bills, the mortgage, the holidays, the clothes, anything. The king comes first. And as we give to him, he remembers his covenant to us, his people who owe everything we have to him.

[36 : 33] Yet he is happy to receive this small token, this handful, this small portion as tribute to him. because if he is your king, if he is the one who you believe has provided everything you have, and most of all your salvation in the Lord Jesus, then he is worthy of your worship.

Because it's his. And let us together offer up to him gladly. Let's pray. our Lord and our king, we thank you that you wanted all the great offerings to be seasoned with salt as a reminder of the covenant you have made with your people.

We thank you for the reminder that no deed we do is prompted by our own goodness, but it's prompted by your grace as you commit yourself to your people time and time again. Please, Father, help us to live lives that show our allegiance to you. Let our work reflect the God we belong to and give us generous hearts, gladly giving you the first portion of all that you have already given us.
we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.