

Basking in the Glow of the Lord of Life

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn now to our Bible reading. Stephen Ballingle, a minister in training here with us, has been leading us through, so very helpfully, the early chapters of Leviticus the last few weeks.

And so we're going to read together this evening Leviticus chapter 3, before he preaches once again on this to us a little later. So Leviticus chapter 3, and we're going to read the whole thing together.

Beginning verse 1. If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord.

And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

And Aaron's sons, the priests, shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar.

And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the Lord, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails, and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys.

[1 : 22] Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood, on the fire. It is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish.

If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the Lord, lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting. And Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar.

Then, from the sacrifice of the peace offering, he shall offer as a food offering to the Lord, its fat. He shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys.

And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the Lord. If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the Lord, and lay his hand on its head, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar.

[2 : 45] Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the Lord, the fat covering the entrails, and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys.

And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the Lord's. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.

Well, amen. This is God's words, and we'll return to it shortly. Evening, everyone. Please do keep Leviticus chapter 3 open in front of you as we go through this passage together.

These first few chapters of Leviticus have given us a window into Old Testament Israel's worship of the Lord. We've taken time to look into what it meant for the Israelites to have their God living in their midst, right in the middle of them, to have his presence so close that they can walk up to his door and spend time in his house.

And as we've done so, we've seen what normal Christian life, normal Christian worship, looks like in the process. That costly devotion to the Lord is the normal response to being made at one with him, at peace with him.

[4 : 22] That we worship the Lord even as we work, as knowing him stretches out into even the most mundane of our activities. And this evening, as we look at the peace offering, we're warmly invited in once more to grab a chair, pull up a seat at the table, and enjoy the overflowing generosity

of the Lord our God.

The Lord invites his people into his house to sit at his table and eat with him. And as we join them, we're going to learn that we are to enjoy the presence of the Lord and that we enjoy him best together.

Because the Lord is not a hard man. He's not stingy. He's not unwilling to show love and affection to his children. He's not someone who doesn't want us to enjoy life, but he is an abundant and generous giver.

Quite often, we picture the Lord as being like a taskmaster or a nitpicking head teacher who will pick us up for the slightest uniform infringement. And the world we live in says far worse, saying that God is anti-joy, that he's anti-woman, that he's anti-love, that he's obsessed with rules that just need to get lost.

But in Leviticus, the book that is made up pretty much entirely of rules, he is pictured as the Lord of life, whose love and generosity is so great that it spills out and overflows into the lives of all who love him.

[6 : 04] And nowhere is that made known better than in his people gathering together to praise his name and consider his great atoning work that he has provided for us.

And that message gets right to the heart of Leviticus because this book is all about relationship with the Lord. Remember, Leviticus is mountain-shaped with all the action drawn towards the center of the book, the day of atonement as the chiasmic structure points us to that.

Atonement really is at the center of the message as Leviticus shows us how the Lord will make himself at one with, reconciled with, at peace with his people. It's a deeply relational book.

All these rules and rituals are serving that relationship between God in all his holiness and us in our sin. And that relationship changes our lives.

There isn't an area of our existence that isn't transformed entirely by being at one with him. And this evening, we'll see that since we are at one with him, that we are to celebrate, that we are to enjoy the Lord our God, to bask in the glow of God's goodness because he is our great host.

[7 : 32] He is the abundant giver of life and the one whose peace impacts not just us as individuals, but as a peace that spreads out into our whole congregation. So as we sink our teeth into this, we're going to look at our passage in three points, all beginning with P.

I'm a good Tron boy. I know my alliterations matter. As we see the practice, the party, and the purpose of this offering. So let's get started by looking at the practice.

And I should say that we're not going to go into great depth over the practice itself as many of the details are really quite similar to what we've seen in previous weeks, particularly in the burnt offering. Instead, we're mainly going to consider the key differences that give the peace offering its unique voice as most of the action actually happens after the offering has taken place.

But here's a brief rundown of what happens in the offering itself. Please follow along in the verses with me. Verse one, you bring your animal to the tent of meeting. This could be a cow or verse six, a sheep, or verse 12, a goat.

And these were costly animals to give that would have given really quite a large amount of meat.

Verse two, once you've brought your animal, you lay your hand on the head of the animal, you press down on it, and remember we said this is identifying with the animal, saying this animal represents me.

[8 : 59] This is the fate that I deserve. And once you've acknowledged that, you slaughter it by your own hand. The animal dies and the priest throws the blood of the animal against the sides of the altar, symbolizing the blood shed for you.

Verses three and four, the offerer cuts up the animal himself, giving various pieces of fat and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver to the Lord. And we get quite a bit of detail and repetition about how the fat is to be separated.

But don't get distracted by that. All it's saying is that all the fat is given to the Lord. Then verse five, the fat, along with the kidneys and liver, is burned up on the altar as a food offering for the Lord.

And it sends up a pleasing aroma to him as the worshiper engaged with his God. That's the gist of this offering. The animal is brought to the tabernacle, slaughtered, and then the fat, liver, and kidneys are burned up on the altar.

But crucially, there are a few factors in this practice that give this offering its nuance from the others around it. There are three differences that make this offering stand out from the crowd, and we'll

consider them now.

[10:09] And that's that this offering is stacked, that it's select, and that it is shared. So firstly, this offering is stacked.

Verse 5 reads, that Aaron's son shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering. So what's happening here? Why are we getting an offering one on top of another?

It's not happened before. Well, we need to remember why the burnt offering was given. If you flick back to chapter 1 and look at the end of verse 4, it reads that the burnt offering shall be accepted for him, the offerer, to make atonement for him.

The burnt offering was all about atonement, being at one with, reconciled to the Lord. So that offering is made, making the offerer right with God, and only then can the offerer bring the peace offering before the Lord.

Only from that position, from the position of being at one with God, may the peace offering be celebrated. And that helps us see that this offering is celebrating that.

[11:19] The peace offering celebrates the atonement given by God to his people. This offering in chapter 3, it doesn't obtain anything in itself, but instead it's celebrating the gift of atonement given through the burnt offering.

This is a real celebration. That's our first difference, and secondly, this offering is select. It's the offering that has all the fat.

I'm sure you'll have picked that up from the reading that the word fat is repeated again and again and again. It comes up 13 times in our passage. And the fat reminds us that in this celebration, the Lord gets the most choice, most select part of the animal.

The fat was prized in their culture, the kind of thing that the Israelite kids would squabble over who gets it. But in this and in all offerings, we read at the end of verse 16, all the fat goes to the Lord. And the liver and kidneys were also prized. They were highly sought after delicacies. It's quite different from how we think about meat in our modern world, but ancient Israel had its tastes and the Lord was speaking into them.

[12:27] So what is offered up to the Lord is the best portion. Just like when you have a good Sunday roast at home, the man of the house gets the first pick of the meat. The best portion.

Dad gets the best joint. And if I've touched a nerve in any families there, I can only apologize. Similarly, our Heavenly Father receives the best portion since he's the head of the family and he's hosting people in his house.

But at the moment there's an unanswered question. What happens to the rest of the animal? Cows, sheep and goats, they're all pretty large animals and once you take away the fat, there's still plenty of meat to go around.

And the significance of what comes next isn't at surface level on the text. If you read this chapter on its own and don't give it much thought then it's just going to blend into the other offerings and become very samey.

If we want to understand what's going on we need to keep on doing some digging. That's why to answer our question we'll go to chapter 7 if you could turn there with me where we'll see that thirdly this offering is shared.

[13:37] As this is the only offering where the Lord the priest and the offerer themselves all eat together from the same table. So chapter 7 and we'll glean some wisdom from this section and yet this sort of section it gives further instruction on the peace offering you can see that in verse 11.

Chapters 1 to 5 tell us the drama of the offerings from the offerer's perspective but chapters 6 and 7 are taken up with priestly instructions for these which help shed some light for us.

So verses 31 and 32 the priest shall burn the fat on the altar but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons and the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings.

The priest receives the breast and the right thigh that's their portion of the offering almost like their fee for taking part. And as they share in this offering the Lord provides for their needs generously giving them some lovely barbecued beef.

And also from chapter 7 we have one further piece of key information. Verses 15 and 16 say this and the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering.

[14:56] He shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a free will offering it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten.

So there's a time limit to this offering. If you sacrifice the animal for an offering of thanksgiving thanking the Lord for your relationship you have together then it's to be eaten before sunset. These were offered on occasions of celebration as King David did in 2 Samuel 6 when the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Jerusalem. They had a peace offering they celebrated that. If it was to confirm a vow you'd freely made to the Lord you could have until the next day. That's the kind of peace offering that Hannah presented to the Lord after the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1 thanking him for his grace and providing a son for her. So there's a time limit to this offering.

Now this actually presents our offerer with quite a big problem and it's the kind of problem that city folk like us just don't understand. We have to admit that in this area we are but humble city dwelling dullards and we know nothing of the cow.

[16:13] Because I've asked several people around this week how much meat do you think you would get from a cow? Think about that to yourself for a moment. How many people do you think you could feed from an average sized cow?

Would it feed 20? 50? Maybe even 80 people? That's what I thought and everyone I've asked this week is given the same ballpark figure and I've asked a lot of people quite a few of you in this room have been on the end of my bizarre beef obsession this week.

So I asked an expert one of our students actually grew up in a cattle farm she knows about cows and says that a healthy well fed cow can feed between 1,000 and 1,500 people.

Can you believe that? Over 1,000 people can get a hefty burger or a good sized steak from this one cow. This has been mind blowing for me this week.

Apparently an adult bull weighs about a ton and you can get several hundred kilograms of beef mince and about 200 kilograms of prime cuts from it you know your roasting joints your steaks and what not and altogether that feeds over 1,000 people with everyone getting a very generous portion too.

[17:31] Now this may seem to you like a glorious positive like the stuff of beefy dreams but actually this is where our problem emerges because you've got all this meat this whole carcass to eat and you've only got until sunset to eat it or if it's a vow offering you've got the next day too but it's still not much time you've shared the right thigh and the breast with the priests and the fat's been burned up on the altar so you've still got enough food for well still about a thousand people it's you in a race against the sun to see how much beef you can get through what do you do?

Well that's what brings us to our second point party this is where we see the real meat pun intended of this offering the lord was teaching his people that his presence is so good that it overflows into the lives of the people around you there's so much food that you need help eating it so that it doesn't go to waste and so the only thing you can do is share it that's what the short time limit on this offering is doing it's encouraging generosity it's not about protecting them from getting food poisoning although it would have had hygiene benefits obviously but it's forcing the offerer's hand to stretch out invitingly to their brothers and sisters their servants the levites the strangers among them to come in and feast in the presence of the lord you can imagine the offerer handing out invites to people getting the whole family around the whole household can come to feast and they've barely made any headway yet so you know what friends servants you can come to and you're still left with a lot of cows so you know what the whole village you can all come all come dig in bring a plate grab your knife and fork get some beef but still there's more left and so everyone can come anyone anyone can come along even if we've never met before come along and share in this feast in the house of the lord Moses helps us here by painting a picture of this feast in deuteronomy chapter 12 which helps build up the picture of what would happen at this offering it's well worth turning there now deuteronomy chapter 12 is a chapter which is all about worship of the lord how his people are to approach him in a way which he sees fit he is god the only god and he decides what is appropriate worship for himself but instead of this being a long list of red tape that kills joy this chapter shows how wonderful it is to know the lord how good it is to serve him and what a blessing it is to be near him so look at verse 7 with me and there you shall eat before the lord your god and you shall rejoice you and your households and all that you undertake in which the lord your god has blessed you and then forward to verse 12 you shall rejoice before the lord your god you

your sons and your daughters your male servants your female servants and the levite that was within your town since he has no portion or inheritance with you and given that the peace offering is the only offering where the offerer the priest and the community share in this together this must be speaking about that and as it does it pictures a beautiful congregational response to being at one with the lord and the real treat the high point of this great great party this barbecue to end all barbecues is that it happens before the lord your god it's before the lord it's in his house the people are feasting and celebrating the lord's goodness together in his house in the very courts of his tabernacle they're welcomed into his home before his very presence celebrating and enjoying the atonement that he's provided often at the peace offering the people would sing a song of praise to the lord and psalm 100 a psalm of thanks was one they would sing regularly and it captures the mood for us brilliantly it says enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise you can just imagine the people doing that can't you give thanks to him bless his name for he is good that's how the israelite would approach him entering his

house with hearts full of joy and praise for he is good they had so much to thank him for and this feast as large and as impressive as it was it was only the tiniest of tokens compared to how good his presence itself was he is the god who reconciles with his people despite their sin despite the fact that they've just grumbled almost all the way from egypt and despite the fact that they worshipped a golden calf that they built themselves he stretched out his hand of grace to them he blessed his people by bringing them in in to himself to his abundant life-giving presence and as he blesses his people that blessing spills out overflowing into the lives of others this is an atonement that comes down and then works out it's vertical between yourself and god but it impacts the horizontal too reaching into the lives of god's people in a multitude of ways it's seen in communal congregational thanksgiving because belonging to the lord together is good and let's remember the role that the lord plays in this meal he is pictured as the great host he's not just another guest but he is the generous provider of this feast he's the one who provides the blood of atonement he provides the meat he's the one who welcomes them into his house and he gives his people a glimpse into life in his kingdom life with him do you think about the lord like that is that how you think about him do you have the picture of thinking of god as a generous and abundant host in your mind or do you think of him as a stingy man a reluctant giver someone who only ever asks for and never gives himself this offering in leiticus gives us a magnificent picture of him that he is the abundant host the best host and we need to get our minds aligned with that he is the god who gives and he welcomes people into his presence to enjoy him it's like he's the sun and we are just basking in his glow picture yourself sunbathing it's not hard to imagine this past week but as you're lying there you know you just you drink in the goodness of the sun as its light shines on your face giving you warmth and joy and you can almost feel your body just drinking in the vitamin d and so should we delight in drinking in the life giving presence of our god this might not be what you'd expect from the book of leiticus you may have been expecting more fire and fury but this is what god was wanting among his people real tangible atonement that meant he could enjoy one another they were to bask in his glory as the

Westminster catechism puts it to glorify him and enjoy him forever because being at one with god is not only the absence of judgment we're not saved into neutrality with him we're not just saved from the darkness of sin but instead we are saved into the light of his joyful positive life-giving and generous and glad presence as we all experience him together that's the kind of feast he puts on for his people and it's the kind of god he is to his people so in our final point we'll ask what was the purpose of this offering what impact did it have on the israelites and what does this offering mean for us today well this offering would have reminded the israelite of two big truths which they would hold on to tightly firstly that the lord's presence is abundant and full of joy as ever what the israelite learns about god and what we learn about god is the main message they were being taught that he is their great host that he has come to dwell in their midst as a gracious loving god not to harm them not to nitpick not to be looking to catch them out but to enjoy them and for them to enjoy him so they were to celebrate that by drawing near to him in worship they had the lord their god dwelling in their midst and they were to appreciate his grace that he shown them by offering up generous worship in service of him at many points in

Israel's history they did do that the psalms are littered with words like these psalm 16 in your presence there is fullness of joy psalm 26 oh lord i love your house and the place where your glory dwells psalm 27 one thing i have asked the lord that i need dwell in the house of the lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the lord psalm 84 for a day in your course is better than a

thousand elsewhere psalm the psalms directed the heart to the lord to the lord to the lord their god to him that they would enjoy him that they would love him not just the good things he gives not just his blessings but him because that's the real treasure for all believers that god gives himself to his people and importantly they were to enjoy that together their second big truth is that the lord's abundant presence is best made known in communion with other believers the congregational nature of this offering is just so clear to see as the lord gathers his people to his house for a grand family feast of celebration israel enjoyed him together the high point of god's presence wasn't found in individual one-on-one experiences with him but together as israel gathered in joyful celebration of thanks to him him who saved him from the house of slavery to him who brought them to himself the lord is the great host and he invited his whole family in to share in this beautiful meal at his table the lord's table together the table where he sat at the head remember the father gets the best portion the lord gets the fat it's a beautiful congregational picture of what israel's great hope was that the lord would prepare a table for them and that they would dwell in the house of the lord forever with him he could invite anyone in the covenant community who was at one with him the levite the servant the poor the stranger all were welcome at the father's table all could enter his courts with praise as long as their trust was in the burnt offering that it was placed on the blood of another isn't that something israel didn't think of the lord as a harsh task master or as a far removed king a nitpicking head teacher but as their host inviting them into his house drawing them in so that they could know love and enjoy him and for us too today we need to hear this message that the lord's presence is good abundant and full of joy because that is aggressively under attack in our world our world wants us as christians and as a church to be ashamed of god to say that he's unkind that he's a god who only cares for himself and his outdated rules that he doesn't want people to enjoy life that he stops people from following their

[31 : 32] heart from following their dreams that he stops people from being true to themselves that he stops people enjoying true love the world wants us to be ashamed of him to hide him away to keep him quiet to put the cosmic kill joy back in his box but leviiticus 3 is a wonderful antidote to that for its message to us today is this take joy in the lord your god our god is the great host who wants us to live and to have life abundantly as the lord jesus said and we're not just to love the good gifts that he gives us but to always be directed to the giver enjoying him the one who's given us everything we enjoy in this life there's a delightful little show called the repair shop on the bbc where there's this team of craftsmen who can fix anything and everything under the sun it's heartwarming stuff as people from all over the uk bring items that mean a lot to them that have fallen into a state of disrepair and you get to watch this team of experts as they fix them up they reunite people with what means so much to them and there's this one case where a boy called jacob who was only 10 years old arrives at the repair shop with his gran they bring in this old folding wooden table which was starting to fall apart and this warped and rickety table it didn't look all that impressive it was small it had seen better days and to anyone looking at it it was only good for the scrap heap but once jacob started talking you understood why this table meant so much to it you see jacob's dad had raised him on his own until his dad got sick and he very sadly passed away when jacob was only six years old and that table was where jacob and his gran spent time with his dad that was his father's table where they would share food together talk with each other celebrate good times cry through the hard times laugh with each other and spend time just enjoying each other they shared time with jacob's dad together at that table and you could see what it meant to them to have it repaired looking as good as new every time they shared a meal at that table they felt like they were dining in his father's presence again that they still had a connection to him that they were still able to remember and enjoy him that was what was most precious to them relationship with his father and surely we're to do the same we're to enjoy him to remember his goodness to celebrate his grace to remember the atonement that he has so generously bought for us not just the gifts he gives but him so how do we do that how do we enjoy the lord more in a word together we enjoy the lord together the congregational aspect of this offering

was so plain to see the lord wanted his people gathered together before him entering his gates with praise reminding each other of how good he is and he's organized all of our calendars to reflect that that we meet for one day every week to worship him to praise him to hear him speak and to meet him together and as we do so as we are transformed by meeting with and enjoying our god it will transform our congregational life we ought to respond in love and generosity to our brothers and sisters because we are celebrating all that the lord has done for us together and this is particularly

true as we gather to celebrate communion the lord's supper together when we gather at his table we consider the great atoning work of the cross the burnt offering upon which everything stands he provides the food and the bread and wine representing his son's body and blood shed for us and we share in this meal together giving us a foretaste of what's to come for the christian feasting in the house of the lord our god forever you might think that to experience god's presence and to draw near to him that you need to go away to remove yourself to connect with god on your own that you need to get your quiet times together and your prayer life back on track or that you need to get that new book that tells you how to get close to jesus how to really know him or you need to listen to that new worship song and i don't want to dismiss you reading your bible or praying these are obviously brilliant blessings for us to enjoy but the lord is clear if you want to draw closer to his presence if you want to experience his abundant life-giving presence that brings joy grab a chair and pull up a seat at the table be part of and celebrate with your church family if you want to experience god's love gather with the people he loves if you want to experience what it means to be in perfect peace with god gather with the people he's at peace with if you want to experience the abundant generosity of god gather with the people who share in that generosity and respond in kind because this this room as we gather together this is the arena where god presents himself his gathered people is where he makes himself known not in his people individually isolating themselves from one another but his presence is made known in action as his people practice generous christ likeness with one another in real life the presence of god is at full volume when he meets with his gathered people as we all meet and take on the likeness of our brother the lord jesus displaying the abundant love of god to one another imperfectly yes but truly the lord god invites us in to worship him like that where he displays his redemptive atoning abundant presence to all his people as he gives us a tantalizing taste of what's to come in the new creation for when we arrive at our heavenly home revelation 21 says that we will not need the light of a lamp or the light of a sun for the lord god will give us light and we will bask in his glory forever so friends brothers and sisters will you keep on enjoying him and will you keep on enjoying him together will you keep on week by week taking your place at the family table as we remember the lord's atoning work praise his name hear his voice and worship him together let's pray our heavenly father and our great host we praise you for who you are that you are the god of abundant life full of joy and blessing for your people we thank you for the atoning work of your son the lord jesus who brought us as a people to you please help us to have real joy in all that you've done for us that we would be those who delight in you and please father help us to enjoy you together knowing that we meet you and your people and your word and in your family as we all take a seat at the father's table together in jesus name amen you and you and some I don't see you as you and