

PERSONAL COST

LEVITICUS 1:2-17

IT COST GOD EVERYTHING SO THAT WE COULD BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. OUR WORSHIP OUGHT TO REFLECT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THAT.

I. WHEN NOT IF (VS 2)

HOW WE GIVE REFLECTS HOW PASSIONATELY WE LOVE GOD.

- A. GIFTS
- B. COSTLY AND PERSONAL
- C. GOD

II. THE MOST BASIC GIFT (VS 3, 10, 14)

WE LEARN TO DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD THROUGH GIVING.

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- B. KINDS OF GIFTS
- C. PARTICULARS OF THE GIFTS

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- A. APPLYING THE BLOOD
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Personal Cost

Leviticus 1:2-17

Last time we were together, we said that God's desire was to live among His people. God's passion is to be in a loving relationship with each one of us. But since God is perfect, and cannot come in contact with imperfection, it is dangerous for us to be in close proximity with Him. Yet the Bible makes it clear that we not only live in close proximity with Him, He actually lives in us.

Through our study through the book of Galatians, we have come to understand that the only reason we are not dead, having come in contact with this perfect and holy God, is because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross for us.

As we continue to study through the book of Leviticus, we can see the provisions God makes for the Hebrews to remain alive even though this holy God lives right in the midst of their camp. Leviticus is not just a book of laws. They are laws that will permit them to remain alive, while in the presence of God.

In addition to preserving their individual lives, God gives them laws that will preserve them as a community and as a nation.

As we study through the book of Leviticus, we can get some idea of what pleases God and what makes Him angry. We can see what kinds of attitudes he expects of us as we live together as the church.

In today's text we are reminded of how costly our salvation was to God, and how we can demonstrate our love for Him. If we truly understand what it cost God to make our salvation possible, we would never get tired of giving of our time, energy, and money.

However, we have often adopted a legalistic attitude of service and giving. Let me give you an example. I'd like to say this happened at the church that was so tough, ... but honestly I can't remember if it was there or here. Maybe someone can help me remember.

All I remember is this. I was in a bible study small group with the retired people. A young mother in one of the other churches we had contact with died, and left three small children behind. As the conversation came up, the older people started saying things like, "Why couldn't God have taken us? We're old, she was so young. We've served the Lord all our lives and now we are ready to go home."

I tried to console them by saying, "I'm sure God left you here for a purpose. He must have something else He wants you to do."

Indignantly this group responded, "Well, we're telling you now, we're not going to do it."

You see, if we think that by giving and serving, we are fulfilling some sort of religious contract, we reach a point at which we feel we have done our part. However, if we remember that our giving and serving are our love responses to what God has done in our lives and continues to do in our lives, we will never get tired of giving, serving, and loving.

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Even though the message of this morning's text is very simple and the structure is straightforward, it is a little confusing to preach through. I would recommend you keep your bibles open and your outlines in front of you. The passage has to do with a specific type of sacrifice. In fact the first seven chapters of Leviticus have to do with sacrifices.

Even though this morning's text has to do with one specific type of sacrifice, there are three options for the giver. He can offer a bull, a sheep, a goat, or a bird. The passage is set up like this. Verse 2 describes the general sacrifice. Verses 3-9 describe the most expensive offering in this type. This would be a bull from the bovine family. Verses 10-13 describe the moderately costly sacrifice in this category. It would be a sheep or a goat. And then in verses 14-17, the least costly sacrifice in this category is described. It is the sacrifice of a bird. Instead of describing each one separately, I will try and combine the similar characteristics of each one.

This morning's message is all about the cost of holiness. The main idea is this. **IT COST GOD EVERYTHING SO THAT WE COULD BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. OUR WORSHIP OUGHT TO REFLECT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THAT.** In other words God gave us His One and Only precious Son Jesus to suffer and die on our behalf. Jesus did this so we could be in a right relationship with God. Worship is not something that we initiate. Worship is always a recognition of and a response to what God has done for us and continues to do for us.

Verse 2 is emphatic about the fact that we will respond to God in love. When talking about bringing a sacrifice the instructions cover when ... not if a sacrifice will be given to God. In other words, the question for us is never if we worship, ... it is always when and how we will worship. And further, **HOW WE GIVE REFLECTS HOW PASSIONATELY WE LOVE GOD.**

The scene from last week was that God called out of the Worship Tent to Moses. God instructs Moses as to the kinds of gifts He will accept on which occasions. Again I want to direct your attention to how God starts His sentence in verse 2. He says, "When any of you brings an offering." It is not a matter of if they bring an offering. God assumes that they will want to bring an offering. Keep in mind that this verse is the start of a 7-chapter section concerning sacrifices. Here the word for offering in verse 2 is *qorban*. It is a general word for sacrifice. It's root word means, "to draw near." In other words, God has an open door policy. His desire is that we draw near to Him. However, the Hebrews had to always keep in mind that God was perfect and holy. And because of this, they were always in danger of being wiped out as they drew near. And so this offering was a way in which they could acknowledge the holiness of God and their own shortcomings.

Again, I think we have forgotten this concept because we have come to take grace for granted. Because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross, we are invited to draw near to God. Here is how the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews states it:

"¹⁹Therefore, brothers (and sisters), since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:19-23 / NIV).

Yes, like the Israelites, we are invited to draw near to God. But we must remember that He is perfect and holy. And since this is the case it is dangerous to be in proximity with Him. The only thing that keeps us safe is the blood of Jesus. The reason we don't die even though this perfect and holy God lives in us, ... is because of the blood of Jesus applied to our lives.

The gifts are meant to be costly and personal. Let's work backwards this time. We were completely sinful and about as unholy as we could be. If God were to even get close to us, we would be vaporized in an instant. However, at great personal cost to Himself, God made a way for us to be in a right relationship with Him. He made a way for us to be so intimate with Him that He could actually take up residence inside of us. The Bible is clear that when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and sets up house. The fullness of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lives in us. Our bodies are referred to as temples of God.

It was extremely personal to God in that He had to send His One and Only Son Jesus to suffer, shed His blood, and die for our sins. And that was costly. God gave the most precious thing He had. The Father gave His Son. The Son gave His life. Our salvation comes to us at great personal cost to God.

And now back to our text. The offering described here is to come from the giver's personal possession. We will learn later that the gift comes from his herd or his flock. Poor people would be able to offer a bird. Here is the point. The gift is to be given freely, not out of compulsion or trying to keep some religious law. The ritual is spelled out so that God will accept the gift. The gift is an expression of our love to God.

Could we say that we give our best to God? For example, are we as careful with what we are doing in church as we are at work? When I was a youth pastor, it was amazing to me that parents could never seem to get their kids to church on time. I asked the parents and the kids if they got them to school on time. "Well of course we get our kids to school on time. What kind of parents do you think we are?" was the indignant reply of the parents. And yet, they never seemed to be able to get their kids to church on time. What were they saying? They were saying that school was more important than church.

We adults would never be late for work or let anything stand in our way from getting there on time. But we really don't care much one way or the other about getting to church on time.

Over the years, I have always been confused about a phenomenon that is pretty common. People are very professional and careful at their jobs. But when they volunteer at church, they don't take things as seriously because they are volunteering. Somehow people have come to value working for money more important than working for God.

When we get short on time, energy, or money, the first thing we cut back on is our church life. The way we live our lives and the way we raise our children clearly demonstrate that God is not first in our lives. We don't value God and we have lost a sense of the holiness of God.

That may sound legalistic, but it's not meant to be legalistic. I simply just stated the facts. We don't value God, church, or our relationship with God. Instead of bringing our best to God, we give Him what's left over of our time, energy, and money.

We all remember the first recorded murder in human history. Cain killed his brother Abel because God accepted Abel's worship but rejected Cain's. As I read the account of their offering, see if you can pick up on why God rejected Cain's worship:

³In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:3-7 / NIV).

The text says that Cain brought some fruits of his harvest. But Abel brought fat portions from the firstborns. Abel brought to God the best of the best he had. Let's take this occasion to think about what we are bringing to God and what we are teaching our children to bring to God. Personally I wish I had understood this better as we raised our own children. It's probably better not to bring anything to God rather than to bring our leftovers.

Part of the reason we do this is because we forget Who He is and how dangerous He is. The God the Israelites worshiped and the God we worship is Jehovah. Do you see the word LORD in all capital letters? That is the covenant name God gave the Hebrews. It is most likely pronounced Yahweh, but we in the West have come to pronounce it Jehovah. This is the God Who delivered the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt. Not only did He free this people and make them His very special people, He destroyed Egypt. He killed every firstborn child in each house. He destroyed the entire army, and left the entire nation broken and destroyed. This is the same God Who raised Jesus from the dead. This is the same God Who will come again to judge the living and the dead. As we study through the book of Leviticus, let us remind ourselves that we serve a holy, perfect, and powerful God. He has personally and passionately given us His Best. **HOW WE GIVE REFLECTS HOW PASSIONATELY WE LOVE GOD.**

The first type of special offering is described in this chapter. Verses 3, 10, and 14 describe the most basic gift. For us, the lesson is **WE LEARN TO DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD THROUGH GIVING.**

The types of gifts offered here are described as burnt offerings. The word for this offering is called an *olah*. The root word means to go up or to ascend. The picture that we will see is that as the animal is burned up on the altar, the smoke rises up to God. The burnt offering is the most basic offering in the Hebrew sacrificial system. Every day for the priests started and ended with this type of sacrifice.

Three different kinds of gifts are described. Verse 3 describes cattle. This would be the most costly sacrifice for the Hebrews. Keep in mind, the animal will be killed and totally burned up. Normally this animal would be used for work or for food. The owner is bringing a perfectly good animal to burn up on the altar.

Verse 10 describes a moderately expensive gift. Sheep and goats were used for wool, milk, and food. They would be smaller than a bull.

Verse 14 describes a dove or a young pigeon. The purpose of this inexpensive animal was that even the poorest of people could offer a gift to God. A poor family would not be able to offer up their only bull, sheep, or goat. But they could afford a small bird.

And now, let's look at the particulars of the gifts. Let me point this out one more time. Somewhere along the line we Christians have come to think anything we do or how we do it in worship is fine. First of all, the livestock must be a male. Some have thought that the males were more valuable. Actually the opposite is true. Females were needed to produce milk and to produce offspring. Even though the Hebrew culture was patriarchal, Hebrew lineage is always traced through and verified through the mother. It may be a little too much to read into this the fact that Jesus came as a male. We know these sacrifices are types of what Jesus will do on the cross for us.

The sex of the birds doesn't seem to matter. However, they had to be a dove or a young pigeon.

Next, the animals had to be perfect. They couldn't have any defects. The animal had to be perfect. So for example, let's say we had a bull that broke his leg, or had a disease or something. That would not be acceptable. In fact, the giver should carefully pick out the best of her flock to offer to God. Again, as I examine my life, I find many places where I offer God my leftovers and not my best. As I study and preach through Leviticus, I hope for that to change. At this point, let me remind us that the Tent of Meeting was located in the center of the camp. Worship was the center of the Hebrew life. Worship ought to be the center of our lives as well. God doesn't need anything from us. All of our lives are to be lived-out-expression of gratitude to God for what He has done and continues to do. **WE LEARN TO DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD THROUGH GIVING.**

One more time we need to remind ourselves that giving here is not just money for us. We are to be giving the best of our time, energy, and money to God. And this next section describes our personal involvement in this gift. We will be looking at verses 4, the first half of verse 5, the first half of verse 11, verses 15, 6, 12, the first half of verse 9 and the first half of verse 13. This will be a gruesome and bloody business. Here is the purpose of it. **IN ORDER TO WORSHIP GOD, WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW DESTRUCTIVE OUR SIN IS.** I'm hoping that we can follow this and identify with it.

In verse 4, the giver of the gift is to lay his hands on the head of the animal that is about to be sacrificed. So the giver would have had to look over his animals, pick out the very best, walk it to the center of the camp where the Worship area was, and bring the animal to the front of the Tent. At this point, the giver would lay his hands on the head of the animal.

The laying on of hands signified two things. The first is a transfer of sin and guilt. In other words, I am transferring my sin and guilt to the animal. I deserve the fate the animal is about to suffer. In verse 4 it says that the transfer of guilt to the animal atones for the giver. The word for atone in Hebrew is *kippur*. It means to cover, to pardon, and to appease. In other words, because I dare come into the presence of a holy God with sin and guilt, I deserve to die. But by transferring this sin and guilt on to the animal, he is killed and receives the punishment I deserve. Clearly Jesus is our atonement. Secondly, it signifies a transfer of ownership. I once owned this animal, but now I am transferring ownership to God.

The laying on of hands makes this ceremony personal. It is for my personal sins that this animal is about to die. It is personal in that I am transferring ownership of this gift from me to God.

Here is the part I think we miss as Christians. I'm pretty sure we understand the transfer of our personal sin on to Jesus so that Jesus receives the punishment we deserve. But we must never forget that in this transaction, we transfer ownership of our lives to God. Most of us live as if we have transferred our sin and guilt to Jesus, but not ownership of our lives. We like to keep that. But if that's the case then the transfer of sin and guilt has not taken place either. If Jesus is not our Lord, then He is not our Savior.

And now the slaughtering of the animal is described. All this takes place in the courtyard in front of the worship tent. Please don't miss how violent this is. In the first half of verse 5 and the first half of verse 11, God commands the giver to slaughter the animal. Let's think about this. We have a male bull, sheep, or goat. We are holding it in a headlock, and then we have to slit its throat. This courtyard is

dust. It is not paved. It is dusty, the animal struggles, as we slit the throat, the animal buckles, and its blood pours out. The priest is there to catch the blood in a container. But it is a dirty, bloody, ugly mess. The giver is reminded how dirty his sin is. Sin is an ugly, dirty, bloody mess. As the giver kills this animal, she is meant to feel the cruelty and brutality of sin. We talk a lot about grace. But until we understand how ugly, dirty, and bloody we are, we cannot even begin to understand grace. Jesus was tortured and executed for our sin. The crucifixion of Jesus was a cruel and brutal, dirty, ugly, and bloody mess. We try to act so cultured and refined. But really God should have held us down and slit our ugly, dirty throats.

In the case of the offering of the bird, the giver would hand the bird to the priest and the priest would twist the bird's head off. Can you sense the brutality of this whole thing?

As we said before, the priests would catch the blood and sprinkle it on the sides of the altar. Again, it is symbolic of the blood Jesus would shed for us. Listen to the author of Hebrews:

"²²In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22 / NIV).

Again, the giver of this sacrifice would be very aware that this blood being sprinkled on the altar should be hers.

After this takes place the giver must skin the animal and cut it into pieces. After the animal is dead, the giver is responsible to skin it and butcher it. The animal must be cut into specific pieces.

In this whole bloody and dirty mess, everyone is to insure ritual cleanliness. It almost sounds funny. But the giver must take the legs and innards of the animal and wash them before he cuts them up and offers them to the priest. The animal may have eaten something unclean or stepped in something unclean. We indeed are sinners and Jesus is the One Who takes away our sin, but in the dirt and mess of this world, we are commanded to remain pure. Yes, Jesus takes away the sin and guilt, but we are still required to pursue holiness. The whole point of this section is to understand what grace really is. **IN ORDER TO WORSHIP GOD, WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW DESTRUCTIVE OUR SIN IS.**

The Hebrews were forced into personal action so that they could understand the magnitude of their sinfulness and the holiness of God, but they were also dependent on priestly involvement. Their involvement is described in the second half of verse 5, the second half of verse 11, verses 7-8, and the second half of verse 15-17. For our time we must remember that **WORSHIP LEADERS ARE TO LEAD US INTO GOD'S PRESENCE.** The priests were responsible to take wood, arrange it on the altar, fire it up, and keep it burning. They were to take the cut up pieces of meat and place them on the altar. They were to offer these up on behalf of the giver. In the case of the bird offerings, the priest had to tear the bird in half, but leaving it joined, throwing the unclean parts in the ash heap and placing the bird on the altar. For us, Jesus is not only our Sacrifice Lamb: He is our High Priest. Jesus does it all for us. But the interesting thing about all this is that the gift is received by God. Let's take a moment to think about this. This whole ceremony is very elaborate. When you come right down to it though, there is no reason God should accept this gift. He is perfect and holy. The giver is sinful. The priests are sinful. The blood is simply the blood of an animal. God doesn't eat, so the barbecued meat doesn't mean anything. And yet, God accepts it as a gift of love.

The ritual is meant to be followed in obedience to God. The giver must come with a humble and contrite heart. The priests must insure they themselves are clean and

not disqualified from offering up the sacrifice. When we come to church each Sunday, we must come with our best. We must come with humble and contrite hearts. All of us who lead must insure we are not disqualified to lead the congregation into worship. As the priests led the giver in the offering of his gift, **WORSHIP LEADERS ARE TO LEAD US INTO GOD'S PRESENCE.**

Look how each section ends in the second half of verse 9, the second half of verse 13, and the second half of verse 17. When we offer our best to God, it becomes an aroma pleasing to God. What a beautiful ending to a horrible, dirty, ugly, and bloody mess. When we offer ourselves to Jesus, He takes our messed up lives and turns them into sweet offerings to God. In Romans 12, Paul captures this whole idea for us. He says:

"¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers (and sisters), in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2 / NIV).

Let us never forget **IT COST GOD EVERYTHING SO THAT WE COULD BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. OUR WORSHIP OUGHT TO REFLECT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THAT.**

David Livingston was a Scottish Presbyterian medical missionary to Africa. He got sick and died there at age 60. Through all his suffering, both physical and personal, he was able to say:

"For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay?"

As we think about what it cost God to redeem us, let us reflect on what we are giving back to Him in love. Are we giving the best of our time, energy, commitment, and money?