

PEACE IS PRICELESS

LEVITICUS 3:1-17

THERE IS NO GREATER EXPERIENCE IN LIFE THAN KNOWING WE ARE AT PEACE WITH GOD.

I. ENJOYING A RICH RELATIONSHIP (VS 1a, 6a, 7a, 12a)

THE PEACE OF GOD ADDS ENJOYMENT TO THE GOOD TIMES IN LIFE AND CARRIES US THROUGH ALL THE HARDSHIPS OF LIFE.

- A. A GENERAL GIFT
- B. A GIFT OF PEACE
- C. A SPECIAL TYPE OF GIFT

II. BEING PRESENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP (VS 1b-4, 6b-10, 12b-15)

PEACE WITH GOD COMES FROM LIVING LIVES OF THANKFULNESS.

- A. BRING OUR BEST (1b, 6b, 7b, 12b)
- B. ACKNOWLEDGING OUR PLACE (2, 8, 13)
- C. RESPONDING TO THE COMMAND (3-4, 9-10, 14-15)

III. GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP (VS 5, 11, 16-17)

GOD HAS ENSURED THAT WE WOULD ENJOY PEACE THROUGH THE ONGOING PRESENCE OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- A. DEMONSTRATING OUR LOVE FOR GOD (5, 11, 16)
- B. REMEMBERING TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR GOD (17)

Peace Is Priceless

Leviticus 3:1-17

There is a television advertisement for MasterCard that goes something like this. A young couple is at a restaurant table drinking champagne and obviously toasting their engagement. The young man is Caucasian and the young woman is Asian, obviously of Japanese descent. As the young man puts the ring on his fiancé's finger, the announcer says, "Ring, ... \$9,000." Next we see the young lady calling her parents and the young man calling his. The next shot is the parents in Japan buying a ticket. The announcer says, "Flight from Tokyo, ... \$6,800." When the camera shows the young man's parents the announcer says, "Flight from Chicago, ... \$1,400." Both sets of parents get together with their children and each other. They are busy shaking hands and bowing. The announcer says, "Dad? Mr. Suki? Dad. Mr. Carson. Akiko. Brian. Mr. Suki. Mr. Carson." The last shot is the young man hugging his future Japanese father-in-law, who seems to be caught off guard. The announcer says, "Dad? Brian? ... Some things are priceless. For everything else, there's MasterCard."

I think that if we take time to get a little more reflective, we would have to say that being at peace with God is what indeed is priceless. All other things in this world pale in comparison.

As we will see in today's passage, peace with God is based on being in a right relationship with God. Too many times we view our relationship with God as a one-sided relationship. We ask God to do things for us and expect Him to come through. However, relationships are meant to be bi-directional. In other words, if we are going to be in a right relationship with God, we must be committed to investing in the relationship just as God is invested in it.

Let me give you an idea of how we slip into a wrong relationship with God. You all remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?)

It was so tough that even the deacons had a misguided idea of their relationship responsibilities towards God. At our board meetings, the deacons would always pray these passionate prayers. One day as we were praying, one of the deacons blurted out, "Enough of this." He opened his eyes and looked up and yelled, "Hey up there, can you even hear us?"

There was no response. He continued, "Hey God, if you can really hear us, tell us what you want us to do with our lives."

A voice from above thundered, "I want you to help the needy and give your life for the cause of peace!"

Faced with more of a challenge than the deacon bargained for, he responded, "Actually God, I was just checking to see if you were there."

The voice from heaven responded, "That's alright; I was only checking to see if you were there."

If we want to experience the peace that God promises us, we need to understand that this peace only comes from being in a right relationship with Him. And above all else, we must remember that being in a relationship with God requires our investment into the relationship as well as just expecting God to invest everything.

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In talking about experiencing the peace of God, we could describe in the words of the MasterCard commercial, "Some things in life are priceless." The main idea of

this morning's text is this. **THERE IS NO GREATER EXPERIENCE IN LIFE THAN KNOWING WE ARE AT PEACE WITH GOD.** If we take time to let this thought sink in, we could see that there is no greater experience in life. If we are truly at peace with God, then everything else in life will fall in place. We will be able to enjoy the times of blessings and we will be able to weather the storms of life with peace as well. God's presence and peace are everything that matters.

The first half of verses 1, 6, 7, and 12 describe people enjoying a rich relationship with God. In other words, **THE PEACE OF GOD ADDS ENJOYMENT TO THE GOOD TIMES IN LIFE AND CARRIES US THROUGH ALL THE HARDSHIPS OF LIFE.** There are three different words used in these verses describing the type of sacrifice involved here.

The first word describing the offering is used to describe a general gift. In each of the religious offerings we have described so far in the book of Leviticus, the word *qorban* has been used as a generic term for a religious gift offered to God. We have seen animal and grain offerings to God. This morning, it will again be an animal offering. And like the previous animal offering, it could be a cow, sheep, or goat. The important thing to remember about all offerings to God, it should be our best, both in the quality of the offering and the best attitude we have. In other words, the offering is a reflection of our love for God.

The next word that appears in these verses describe that this is a gift of peace. English versions translate this in several different ways. It is described as a fellowship offering, a peace offering, or a well-being offering. All of those are good. The word in Hebrew is *shelemim*. It comes from the same root as *shalom* which we all recognize as peace. We often describe peace as the absence of conflict in our lives. However, in this context, if we define this as a fellowship offering, we are not talking about fellowship with one another. We are talking about being in fellowship with God. If we refer to this as a peace offering, we are not talking about peace with other human beings. We are talking about being at peace with God. Our well-being should not be dependent on what circumstances we are going through and how other people are treating us. This is talking about being right with God. Just so there is no mistake about what kind of peace God offers, let's listen to what Jesus says:

"³³I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 / NIV).

Jesus promises that we will experience trials and troubles of all sorts. And yet He offers us peace. What Jesus offers us is a right relationship with God. This type of offering could be described by picturing us in God's presence able to say, "All is well with my soul."

The next word used here is *zebach* and it describes a special type of gift. In this group of sacrifices, everything is not burned up. The worshiper will give a portion to God, a portion to the priest, and take the rest home to eat with his family and friends. Rules and reasons on how to offer and dispose of the sacrifice will be given later on in chapter 7. However, what we must keep in mind here is that just as there are rules that govern what and how to sacrifice, there will be rules as how to eat the rest of the offering.

In chapter 7 we will find out that this offering of a fellowship-sacrifice will cover three different occasions: 1. Simply thanking God, 2. For making or completing vows, and 3. As a free-will offering. We will describe these more in depth when we get to chapter 7. However, I want to point out is that all sacrifices are not for obtaining forgiveness of sin. The sacrificial system of Israel points to a balanced religious life. We tend to focus on God forgiving us for our sins and asking Him for favors that we

want. I'm hoping that we can be a little more balanced in our relationship with God. When the Hebrews offered this fellowship offering, they were acknowledging that peace with God makes life worth living. For us, we should remember that **THE PEACE OF GOD ADDS ENJOYMENT TO THE GOOD TIMES IN LIFE AND CARRIES US THROUGH ALL THE HARDSHIPS OF LIFE.**

Keep in mind that we said we can only enjoy this peace with God by being in an intimate relationship with Him. Did you ever see this scene on television, or God forbid in your own home? The wife is talking to the husband while his head is buried in the newspaper or he is watching a sporting event on television. He is nodding but we know he isn't hearing a thing. He is not really there. Too many times I think that God has been speaking to me, but I just wasn't really paying attention. Have you been there? In the second half of verse 1 thru verse 4, the second half of verse 6 thru verse 10, and the second half of verse 12 thru verse 15, remind us that we must be present in the relationship. The important thing for us to remember is that **PEACE WITH GOD COMES FROM LIVING LIVES OF THANKFULNESS.**

I have said this before, but I think it is worth repeating. I think we don't enjoy the peace and joy God has for us because we have attitudes of entitlement. We feel that God and the world owe us. If we try to be good, then God should give us what we want. That is an attitude that we grow up with in the United States. I'm not sure why, but that is the case.

On the other hand, if we want to experience the peace and joy God promises, then we must adopt a totally different attitude. We must start from the premise that we don't deserve a thing. The only thing any of us is entitled to is an eternity in hell. If God were to give us exactly what we deserve, we would all be spending an eternity in hell. Therefore, we need to learn to live our lives with attitudes of thankfulness.

The Apostle Paul sums it up like this:

"⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 / NIV).

Notice that Paul said that we are to approach God with thanksgiving. The way to find the peace of God is through thanksgiving, trusting God to do the best for us.

Then Paul goes on to give this formula:

"⁸Finally, brothers (and sisters), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:8-9 / NIV).

In other words, aligning our thoughts and behaviors with things that please God will bring us peace. The thing we must focus on is to learn to be thankful to God for everything, while conforming our thoughts and behaviors so that they match the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do that first of all by bringing God our best as described in the second half of verses 1, 6, 7, and 12. Unlike the burnt offering sacrifice, the animal does not have to be a male. It could either be a male or a female cow, sheep, or goat. However, it must be perfect, without any defects. For example, if a cow broke its leg, the owner would then be forced to use the cow as meat. He could reason with himself, "Well, I need to kill this cow anyway. I may as well take it and offer it as a fellowship offering to God. I'll give God His portion since I'm not allowed to eat the fat, blood,

and organs anyway. I'll give the priest his portion, and then bring the animal home to eat."

Do you see how the person could easily reason this? However, if someone wanted to offer an authentic fellowship offering to God, she would have to take a perfectly good animal, one that would not be singled out for food, and offer that to God. In other words, God is not interested in our leftover time, money, and energy. We must constantly be willing to offer Him our best. I know in my own life, I often put off doing my devotions until I find a convenient time for me, no matter how tired I am. However, these days, I am trying more and more to give God my best time. I am best first thing in the morning. That is the time I'm trying consistently to give to God. I try to give my tithe before I even take a cent for myself. God gave me His best. He gave His One and Only Son to die for me. I need to keep that in mind. So the first way we can be present in our relationship with God is to bring Him our first and our best.

Secondly, we can be truly present with God by acknowledging our place as described in verses 2, 8, and 13. Just like in the burnt offering sacrifice, the worshiper would have to lay his hands on the head of the animal. This would symbolize the fact that he was transferring all his sin and unrighteousness on to the animal. She would then have to slaughter the animal while the priest caught the blood. The priest would then take the blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar. This is to remind the worshiper that God is holy. He is one of a kind. He is unique. He is perfect, righteous, and holy. The worshiper is sinful, unclean, and dirty. He is so different from God that he should immediately die as he enters the presence of God. And yet because of God's love for us, He allows the animal to become a substitute for the Hebrew. Even though this sacrifice is not primarily a sacrifice of atonement or forgiveness of sin, the worshiper is reminded that we can only approach God through blood. For us, we are always welcomed and invited into God's presence by the blood of Jesus. Since we don't have to physically slaughter an animal, nor did we physically hammer the nails through Jesus' feet and hands, we often lose sight of how unclean, unholy, sinful, dirty, and unworthy we are on our own to enter the presence of God. It would do us well to remind ourselves often that we only enter the presence of God and we are only allowed to talk to Him because of the precious blood of Jesus spilled out on our behalf. If we don't acknowledge our true state of affairs, we can never be genuinely present to God in a relationship.

When we quoted the Apostle Paul earlier, we emphasized the fact that we experience God's peace as we learn to live with attitudes of thankfulness. Further we said that conforming our thinking and behavior to God's commands brings us peace. In verses 3-4, 9-10, and 14-15, we are reminded that we are required to respond to the commands of God. Somewhere along the line, we believers have gotten the impression that God's commands have become God's suggestions. God made it very clear what He expected from the worshiper. All the fat that covered the organs were to be removed. The kidneys were to be removed. And in the case of the sheep, the entire fat tail was to be cut off. This was a very special breed of sheep. They stored all their excess fat in their tail. These tails could weigh up to 10 or 20 pounds. The worshiper was required to present these to the priest to burn on the altar.

Later on we will see that these parts were burned on the altar as an offering to God. The blood was sprinkled against the altar. These were the parts God took in the offering. The priest would receive the breast and thigh portions. The worshiper would take the rest of the meat home to eat with his family and friends.

Sometimes I think we try to read too much into the commands of Scripture. We try to find all sorts of reasons for why they did things the way they did. All that really

matters is that God told them to present themselves before Him in a very specific way. God told them what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. They simply needed to obey and follow directions.

I can't begin to tell you how many times as a pastor I have watched people make up their own rules for living, even though they were directly against the clear commands of Scripture. And what really has amazed me and continues to amaze me is how people rationalize their thoughts and behaviors. If we want to experience the peace and joy God has for us in life, we must obey His commands. We must allow God to transform us and conform us to the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do this by thanking God for absolutely everything, and by submitting our thoughts and behaviors to His will for us as He has revealed to us in the Bible. **PEACE WITH GOD COMES FROM LIVING LIVES OF THANKFULNESS.** And the primary way we demonstrate thankfulness is through submission and obedience.

We must be present in our relationship with God because verses 5, 11, 16-17 illustrate God's presence in the relationship. Think about this for a moment. **GOD HAS ENSURED THAT WE WOULD ENJOY PEACE THROUGH THE ONGOING PRESENCE OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.** In the Old Testament times, God revealed Himself and was present to Israel in God the Father. He presented Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire at night, in the worship tent in the wilderness, and later in the temple. In the next stage of salvation history, God presented Himself and lived among human beings in Jesus, The Son. Jesus took on human flesh, lived, and moved among human beings. And today God is present by the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. God has presented Himself, presents Himself, and will continue to be present for a relationship to all who come to Him in love, humility, and submission. Verses 5, 11, and 16 remind us that actually demonstrating our love for God is important. The priest would take the portions of the sacrifice the worshiper brought to him, and burn them up on the altar.

The offering was made to only One God, Jehovah. Again, you will notice that LORD is spelled in all capital letters. This is God's covenant, relationship Name. This fellowship offering becomes pleasing aroma to God. This offering is simple to understand. God likes to hear us say things like, "I love You Lord. Thank You Lord. Where You send me, I will go, and what You command me, I will do." For me, and my hunch is for many of you, I find that I don't say thank You or I love You enough to God. I find that I often, too often, take God's love for granted. And remember, talk is cheap. This act of saying, "I love You," to God was very costly to the Hebrew worshiper. She was taking a very costly animal and offering it to God. Jesus made it clear that we shouldn't say thank You to Him or even address Him as Lord if we don't submit to His commands. Jesus put it this way:

"²¹Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23 / NIV).

The frightening thing about all of this is that many of us who think we are good and doing all sorts of religious stuff, may in the end be just as lost as unbelievers. Submission and obedience to all of God's commands, not just the ones we agree with are what it takes to please God. The Hebrews had to offer their sacrifices exactly the way God commanded. We should not feel free to ignore the commands of God we don't like or interpret commands so that they agree with what we think and what we

want to do. As we go through the book of Leviticus, this theme will present itself over and over again.

And finally, as verse 17 illustrates, we should often remember to show our love for God. In verse 17, God commands the Israelites never to eat any fat or blood. They were not instructed to do this to control their cholesterol or to keep their calorie intake down. They were commanded to never eat the fat or blood because it would remind them that everything they have is a gift from God and even if they were not offering a particular animal up for sacrifice, they should still acknowledge that this animal belongs to God.

We would do well to stop at times during the day and acknowledge God presence and His legitimate claim to our lives. That means whatever we are thinking, saying, or doing should be in submission to God's presence and ownership. Jesus wants us to always remember the fact that He is present:

"²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:26-27 / NIV).

Indeed God is always present in the relationship. The fact is **GOD HAS ENSURED THAT WE WOULD ENJOY PEACE THROUGH THE ONGOING PRESENCE OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

We can buy all sorts of things in this life. We can buy clothes, jewelry, cars, houses, even prestige, status, and popularity. However, peace with God is priceless. In his commentary on Leviticus, Derek Tidball says this:

"it was possible for the worshipper in Israel to enjoy God's presence and bask in his goodness through the peace offering. Without any shade of arrogance, it sounded a note of assurance about their present relationship with God and a note of confidence about the future provision he would make for them.

As the Christian believer might put it:

Perfect submission, all is at rest,

I in my Saviour am happy and blest;

Watching and waiting, looking above,

Filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

This is my story, this is my song,

Praising my Saviour all the day long."

"Blessed Assurance" by Fanny Crosby