

BLESSING EXPLOSIONS

LEVITICUS 7:11-38

TRULY THANKFUL PEOPLE BECOME A SOURCE OF BLESSING TO MANY

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Blessing Explosions

Leviticus 7:11-38

Last time we were together, I said that we were going to start a new section today. My reasoning was this. From the beginning of the book through chapter 7, verse 10, Moses described the sacrifices from the individual worshiper's perspective.

In this morning's text, a review of the sacrifices will be described from the perspective of the priests. Then the next 3 chapters will specifically deal with regulations that pertain to priests.

From a literary point of view, the first section of the book does not end until verses 37 and 38 of our text today. I will discuss that later. However, I would still say that today's text is kind of transitional because even though it deals with a summary of the sacrifices, it still pertains to the sacrifices from the priests' perspective. The book will then move into the regulations governing priests.

The passage we are going to study this morning is a review of the fellowship offering. This offering had to do with being at peace with God. Peace is something that we all want to experience. However, we are often not willing to do the work laid out in Scripture to experience this peace. What we really want is short cuts to happiness.

When I preach about abundance, peace, or joy, I know people will misinterpret the concepts and try to apply worldly ideas to it. Let me give you an example. I'd like to say this happened at the church I used to pastor. However, I'm fairly certain it happened here. I have always looked to women to bring a sense of reason and sanity to our leadership teams.

One particular woman who I had a great deal of respect for was facing some very difficult situations in her life and was struggling to find that peace. One day I came into the office and found her smiling and very happy.

I asked her what happened and here is how she responded:

"Pastor, last week in your sermon you said that one of the things that prevent us from experiencing inner peace is leaving things undone. You went on to say that one of the principles in achieving inner peace is to finish all the things we've left undone. Further in concluding that point you said, 'The way to remove this obstacle to inner peace is to finish all the things you have started.'

So I looked around my house to see all the things I started and hadn't finished, so, before leaving the house this morning, I finished of a bottle of wine left over in the refrigerator, finished a half-bag of Oreo cookies, the rest of a strawberry cheesecake, a box of chocolates, and the rest of a bottle of Bailey's Irish Cream whiskey.

I have to tell you pastor, you have no idea how good I feel. Thank you for the sermon."

I don't want anyone here this morning to go home with that type of interpretation, ever.

When we truly talked about this particular sacrifice, we said that experiencing the peace of God is really a priceless experience. We also said that the way to experience this peace was to be people who are thankful for everything. What we are going to learn this morning is this. Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **TRULY THANKFUL PEOPLE BECOME A SOURCE OF BLESSING TO MANY.**

Again, we don't often think in terms of community. We tend to think in terms of individuals. However, as we saw in the case of sin, our actions and attitudes affect people around us and certainly affect the church. I'd like us to see how when we live thankful, joyful, prayerful lives, we place ourselves in a position to receive God's blessings and we are called to share these blessings and to pass them on.

I. THE BLESSINGS OF GOD'S PEACE (VS 11-14)

When thankful people give of their time, energy, and money, not only is the giver blessed, but god and the church are blessed as well.

Verses 11-14 lay out the blessings of God's peace. Here is a principle for our lives. **WHEN THANKFUL PEOPLE GIVE OF THEIR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY, NOT ONLY IS THE GIVER BLESSED, BUT GOD AND THE CHURCH ARE BLESSED AS WELL.**

A. ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S PEACE (11)

In verse 11, we are encouraged to acknowledge God's peace. Let me just quickly remind us that another word for the fellowship offering could be the peace offering. It came from the root word that *shalom* comes from. That is the Hebrew word for peace. Further, we have said over and over throughout the years that peace in the Bible never meant the absence of conflict. Peace in the Bible has everything to do with being in a right relationship with God. When we studied through chapter 3, we noted that the animals for sacrifice for this type of offering could be a bull or a cow, a male or female sheep or goat. The blood was to be splashed against the altar and the fat, kidneys and liver was to be burned up on the altar as a sacrifice to God. But what I want us to keep foremost in our minds is that peace with God ought to cause blessings to spill out on those around us.

Next, we must never forget Who God is. In verse 11 He is identified as Jehovah. Since He is God, He is the One Who determines how we are to approach Him and how we can be at peace with Him. In the very first phrase of verse 11, the prescriptions concerning the sacrifices are called regulations. That word in Hebrew is *torah*. It means laws. These are not guidelines or suggestions. They are laws. Keep in mind that we stand before God sinful, dirty, and totally unacceptable. If we want to have this broken relationship restored, we must do it His way. I am constantly amazed at how arrogant we human beings can become. We have come to think that we can approach God on our terms and approach Him in ways that we feel comfortable.

First of all, the way these sacrifices were set up, neither the worshiper nor the priest could ever feel comfortable in the presence of God. The Hebrews watched God bring the awful plagues on Egypt. They saw God kill the firstborn in every Egyptian household, and they saw God drown the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Further, they saw the awful fire, cloud, and smoke on top of Mt. Sinai when Moses went up to receive these very commandments. And they heard the deafening thunder. As a reminder, they saw the constant pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. As sinful human beings, we should never feel comfortable enough in the presence of an all-powerful holy God to be sloppy or lazy when it comes to worshipping Him. We should never feel free to twist His commands or to ignore the ones we don't feel comfortable with.

We have been taught from youth to be proud, independent, aggressive, and individualist. Again, these qualities may make us good Americans and successful in the world. However, these qualities make us horribly defective Christians. In order to be Christians at peace with God we must be humble, submissive, repentant, and obedient. There is no other way to find peace with God. I'm afraid the preaching and teaching of the church, to include myself in this as a pastor, have really watered down Christianity. I know that we have reacted to the legalism we grew up with, but the truth is that we must keep in mind that we worship and serve a holy all-powerful God. As I have been preaching and teaching through Leviticus, I have been forced to ask myself over and over again whether God is in the first place in my life. If we want to find peace in life, it can only come from giving God the first place and priority in our lives. There is no other way. It is good for us to use this study through Leviticus to examine our priorities in life. Peace with God only comes with humble submission to God. It

comes from humble obedience to God. It comes from humble and genuine repentance. Acknowledging God's peace means acknowledging that only God can grant peace and it can only be obtained through His method.

B. ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S OWNERSHIP (12-13)

Verses 12-13 remind us that in order to receive God's peace we must acknowledge God's ownership. In today's text, we will see at three occasions on which a worshiper offers a fellowship offering.

The first is listed in verse 12. It is an expression of thankfulness. In other words, this is an attitude that understands that everything, including life itself is a gift from God. A person who is authentically thankful realizes that everything belongs to God. Everything in the universe belongs to God. Everything that we have or "own" belongs to God. Our lives belong to God. If we want to know what thankfulness is, we must get it in our minds that everything comes as a gift from God. If we come to acknowledge this then we can experience God's peace.

And now, along with the prescribed animal sacrifice, the worshiper is called to bring three types of grain offerings. They are to bring cakes of bread, wafers, and cakes of fine flour. They are to be baked or fried with fine oil. Again, there is no yeast. I think there is some symbolism here but I am going to be restrained in pointing out some of the symbolism I see here.

First of all, the cakes of bread and flour made without yeast would remind the Israelites of their escape for Egypt. In offering up these cakes, they would have to once again be reminded that if it were not for God, they would still be slaves in Egypt. They owed their freedom and existence to God. The wafers would remind them of the manna they received from heaven each day. God miraculously fed them in the wilderness for 40 years with these supernatural wafers from heaven. The oil was a sign of God's Holy Spirit. It was the product of anointing priests, prophets, and kings. I think these cakes and wafers were meant to remind the Israelites that they owed their very existence to God. When we celebrate communion, when we anoint the sick with oil, when we dedicate babies and adults with water and oil, and when we put money in the offering, we are to do this as a public acknowledgement that everything we have belongs to God.

And then look at verse 13. Sometimes I think those of us who preach and teach the Bible over generalize some concepts. When we see the word *yeast* in the Bible, we want to jump on it and translate it negatively. Many times yeast is used to describe evil, but not always. Here in verse 13, along with the animal sacrifice, a cake of bread, a wafer, and a cake of flour, the worshiper is to bring cakes of bread baked with yeast.

Again, I want to resist the temptation to get carried away but here is what I think is symbolized. On the Passover night, they had to bake bread without yeast because they didn't have time. They had to get ready to go. However, bread with yeast in it, takes time. You have to mix the dough and put yeast in it. Then you have to cover it and let it sit. When it rises, you need to mix it up again, cover it, and wait for it to rise again. This all takes time. Then it is formed into loaves and baked in an oven or fried. To me, this symbolizes a situation that describes a person who is settled. The person has time to spend on important things. Presenting this baked bread to God seems to me that the person is saying that she wants to take time to fellowship with God.

I want to quote a verse that we often quote out of context. I do it all the time when I am evangelizing. I think it's o.k. to take it out of context because the truth it teaches could apply. However, let me just put it in context for us. In the book of Revelation, the risen Jesus is sending a message to the church in Laodicea. They have come to be very complacent in their worship. They seem to be a lot like our approach to our relationship with God. They still worshiped God, but it seems that God and church had just become another appointment in

their day planners. Jesus said to them that He was disgusted with them and He was going to spit them out of His mouth as one spits out lukewarm stale disgusting water. After rebuking them for not putting God first, He says this to them:

"²⁰Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends" (Revelation 3:20 / NLT).

I want us to remember that Jesus was talking to Christians. And the picture He paints is that He is not in their hearts. He is locked out. He is knocking at the door of their hearts and He is calling out for them to let Him in. I hope that as we reflect that God owns us and everything we have, we will come to realize that we have all sorts of things in our lives that we have given priority over Him. Please let us take time to listen for Him. He is knocking at the door of our lives and He is calling out for us to let Him in. We want to call Him Lord. But if He is not Lord over everything in our lives, then He is not Lord at all. The picture of Jesus sitting down and eating with us is the picture of peace painted by this loaf of bread brought by the Jewish worshiper with the thanksgiving fellowship offering.

C. ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S PROVISION (14)

Perhaps if we are not enjoying the peace in life that we desire, it may be because we have not given God first place and priority in our lives. He owns everything. And because of that verse 14 describes acknowledging God's provision. We have talked about this in previous sermons but let me just recap this point.

The worshiper was to bring the animal, three bread products without yeast, and a loaf of bread baked with yeast. Please look at the language in verse 14. This is a contribution to Jehovah. God turns around and gives it to the priest who led this worshiper in worship. God provides for those who follow and serve Him. The more generous the worshiper is, the happier God is and the more the priests would receive. The more generous we are with our time, energy, talents, resources, and money, the happier God is and the more blessed this church and all the people we serve will be. But authentic giving is only given by truly thankful people. The more we realize what God has done for us, what He continues to do, and what He will do for us in the future, the more thankful we will be. **WHEN THANKFUL PEOPLE GIVE OF THEIR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY, NOT ONLY IS THE GIVER BLESSED, BUT GOD AND THE CHURCH ARE BLESSED AS WELL.**

II. PASSING ON GOD'S BLESSINGS (VS 15-18)

Thankful People Generously Share With Others

People who are at peace with God seem to always be passing on God's blessings as described in verses 15-18. In other words **THANKFUL PEOPLE GENEROUSLY SHARE WITH OTHERS.** I'll be 60-years-old in a couple of years. I have traveled all over the world. And one thing I have observed is this. You would think that very rich people are generous and poor people are stingy. However, the opposite is true. I have found that in general, the poorer people were, the more generous they were. Of course there are exceptions. I have been treated very well by some rich and powerful people and I have experienced bitter and stingy poor people. But I have traveled in both circles, and for some reason, many poor people are really thankful and willing to share what little they have. So thankfulness is an attitude that we can all adopt: rich or poor. The attitude that will hold us back is an attitude of entitlement. People, rich or poor, who have this attitude of entitlement, are almost always unhappy, bitter, and stingy. Whether they have little or a lot, they are never satisfied. People who go through life with an attitude of entitlement can never be a blessing to anyone, nor can

they ever please God. So let us start to develop attitudes of thankfulness and receive all of life as a gift.

A. OCCASIONS FOR SHARING GOD'S BLESSINGS (15-16)

In verses 15-16, we run into to more occasions for sharing God's blessings. An occasion to bring a fellowship offering would be when a person was taking or completing a vow. For example, if a person was going to take a vow to fast for one week, she could bring an offering as a sign of her commitment to complete this vow. When it was over, she could bring another sacrifice to thank God for allowing her to complete the fast. Next, someone could just feel extremely thankful and blessed. This would be a way of his expressing his thankfulness. This was called a freewill offering. It was spontaneous, and for no particular reason except his gratitude to God. It would be like a husband buying flowers for his wife for no reason at all except that he was thinking about how much he loves her. My hunch is that not many of us take enough time to think about God and how good He has been to us, to get to a point where we are simply overcome with His love. Or if we are, we don't know what to do.

Vows and spontaneous thankfulness are occasions that give the worshiper a chance to share God's blessings with priests, family, and friends. After the portion of fat and innards, along with the bread were burned up on the altar, the priest was given a portion of the meat and bread as well. The rest of the meat and bread was given to the worshiper to share with her friends and family. Concerning the thanksgiving offering, the worshiper and her guests had to eat everything the day the sacrifice was offered. None could be saved for the next day. The worshiper's portion of the offering that came as a result of a vow or a freewill offering could be eaten the day of the sacrifice and the next day. However, none could be eaten on the next day.

B. RULES FOR SHARING GOD'S BLESSINGS (17-18)

Which brings us to the rules for sharing God's blessings illustrated in verses 17-18. Think about how God trained the Israelites in the beginning. When God sent the manna from heaven, the Israelites had to gather just enough each day to eat for that day. None could be left until morning. When they tried to keep it until the next day, God made sure the manna spoiled and was infested with maggots. However, on the day preceding the Sabbath, God sent them a double portion because they were not allowed to work on the Sabbath. In this case the manna did not spoil. They were allowed to eat it the next day. However, they could not save it beyond that. I hope we are making the connections here. God wanted them to always remember that He was the One Who provided for them. Gathering too much or hoarding was a sign they did not trust God to provide for them.

If these rules were not followed, look at the consequences in verse 18. If they disobeyed even one of the rules regarding the sacrifice, the sacrifice would be worthless. God would not accept the sacrifice. All that work would have been done for nothing. And the person who violated the command would be considered to be guilty. In verses 20, 21, 25, and 27, the penalty is described as the person being cut off. The word used there is *karath*. It literally means to cut. It is used in referring to God's cutting a covenant with Israel. When God cut a covenant with Israel, it meant that He was blessing them. If He was cutting them off from the covenant, it meant that they were being cut off from God's blessings. Yes, we must be careful to obey God's commands, but what I want us to remember from this section is this.

THANKFUL PEOPLE GENEROUSLY SHARE WITH OTHERS. Let's put this concept into modern day times. As Christians we are all part of the body of Christ. We should be willing to share our time, energy, and money with God and with other believers. Giving is a sign of thankfulness.

III. CAUTION IN HANDLING GOD'S BLESSINGS (VS 19-27)

Taking God's Blessings For Granted Is Dangerous

Again, verses 19-27 remind us that we must exercise caution in handling God's blessings. What I'm getting at here is that **TAKING GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR GRANTED IS DANGEROUS.**

A. CARELESSNESS WITH HOLY THINGS (19-20)

Verses 19-20 describe carelessness with holy things. The meat offered in the sacrifice was considered to be holy. It was offered up in a ceremony dedicated to God. If the rules said the sacrifice could be eaten that day only, then whatever was left over had to be burned up. The same rule applied to the food that could be eaten that day and the next. At the end of the second day, the leftovers had to be burned up. Think about how people reason. People may comment on how burning up the leftovers is a waste of food. But remember, Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus said that about the woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. Please remember this. The world may criticize you for the time, money, and energy you spend on your relationship with God and His people. But that so-called waste of time will bring a great deal of blessings to you and to those around you.

B. INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS PURSUING HOLY LIVING (21)

Don't look to the world for advice or evaluation because they are indifferent to the things of God. Verse 21 describes the offense of being indifferent towards the pursuit of holy living. The world, your friends, even the friends who we may think are Christian will consistently tell us not to become fanatical in our love for God. The person described in verse 21, has come in contact with a person, animal, or a thing that was unclean, therefore, making them religiously unclean for a specified period of time. And yet, the person pays no attention to it and participates in the meal. Think about what that person has done. He has ruined the whole sacrifice for his friend who had offered up the sacrifice, and he has cut himself off from God's blessings. Please don't take advice from the world, from immature Christians, or fake Christians. We must be careful in pursuing holy living.

C. GOD GIVES US FREEDOM (22-24)

In all of this, God gives us a certain amount of freedom in verses 22-24. We have a great deal of freedom as Christians. The Israelites were forbidden from eating the fat of cattle, sheep, and goats. Whether the animal was being used in a religious ceremony or even if it wasn't, they could never eat the fat. That was to be a reminder for them that God was Lord of even their everyday lives. Look at the freedom here. They could use the fat for fuel or other purposes. They just could not eat it. Let's take a look at our sinful, rebellious natures. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were free to eat from hundreds of fruit trees. They had an incredible amount of choices.

D. FREEDOM DOES NOT MEAN LICENSE (25-27)

And yet, we find their attention drawn to the single tree out of the thousands, the one forbidden tree. That brings us to verses 25-27. Freedom does not mean license. We are not free to sin and make up our own rules for living. Adam and Eve had thousands of free choices. And yet they focused on the one forbidden choice. They ate from the one forbidden tree and they lost Eden forever. The Israelites were forbidden to eat blood from animals. Life was in the blood. God wants us to remember that life is only in Him. When we rebel by disobeying

God, making up our own rules, or simply become indifferent towards God or pursuing holiness, then we cut ourselves off from God's blessings. God offers us eternal life and peace, joy, and contentment in this life. When we put other things before God, we cut ourselves off from these blessings. Many Christians are unhappy because they have cut themselves off from God's blessings. In general, Christians ought to be characterized by peace, joy, and contentment. If we are not experiencing these blessings, then we ought to reexamine our priorities and where we have placed God in our lives. The point is this. **TAKING GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR GRANTED IS DANGEROUS.**

IV. HOLY RELATIONSHIPS ARE BLESSINGS FROM GOD (VS 28-38)

*Thankfulness Leads To Generous Giving Which In Turn
Brings Joy To The Entire Church*

I know that we in the United States don't take our church lives very seriously. But verses 28-38 remind us that holy relationships are blessings from God. **THANKFULNESS LEADS TO GENEROUS GIVING WHICH IN TURN BRINGS JOY TO THE ENTIRE CHURCH.**

A. THANKFULNESS (28-30)

Thankfulness is again described in verses 28-30. The worshiper was to bring the sacrifice to the worship area and prepare it there. After butchering the animal into its designated portions, the worshiper would take each portion in her hands, raise it up to the Lord in worship, and wave it. This act demonstrated that everything belongs to God and that the worshiper was now committed to sharing all the blessings with God, with the priest, and with her family and friends. If we were to measure how thankful we are to God for all His blessings by how much time, work, energy, and money we dedicate to God and His people, how thankful would we say we are?

B. GENEROSITY (31-36)

Verses 31-36 go to again summarize generosity. After God's portion is waved by the worshiper, the priest burns it up on the altar. Then the worshiper gives the right thigh of the sacrifice to the priest. The bread offering and the meat were shared with the priest. I should stop here and say that over the 17 years that I have been here, I have to say that all of you have been very generous in sharing your time, energy, and money with me and my family. We are extremely grateful to you for this. Thank you for your love and your care.

C. JOY (37-38)

In verses 37-38 we are reminded of the joy thankful and generous people bring to the community. This is a summary that marks the end of the first section of the book of Leviticus. Throughout the years, people have tried to discredit the Bible. One of the assertions they make is that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible, even though the Bible and Jesus Himself refers to these books as the books of Moses. These two verses follow the ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian literary device that marks off sections of works that help them keep different scrolls in order. Moses would have learned this type of literature in the palace of Pharaoh. And further the entire book of Deuteronomy is written in Hittite treaty form. These types of literature were popular during the time of Moses, not hundreds of years later when these so-called scholars try and say the books were written. We have seen in this

first section that God want to live with us and in us. However, since He is holy and we are not, there is always a danger and a tension for us. God remedied that for the Hebrews by instituting the sacrificial system by which they could live out their faith and obedience to God. This would keep them safe and in a right relationship with God. No matter what the circumstances in the wilderness, they could enjoy the joy of being at peace with God.

V. EPILOGUE

We have Jesus. Because of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, we can be in a right relationship with God and no matter what our circumstance in life; we can experience the joy of being at peace with God. Listen to how Paul puts it:

"³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. ³⁹Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39 / NLT).

That is the Bible's definition of peace, being right with God and enjoying the relationship with Him. **THANKFULNESS LEADS TO GENEROUS GIVING WHICH IN TURN BRINGS JOY TO THE ENTIRE CHURCH.**

The Apostle Paul was so grateful to God for saving his soul that he dedicated his entire life to serving God and bring the Gospel to people all over the world. People are still being blessed today, 2000 years later because of Paul's thankful generosity. How thankful are we? It's an important question because **TRULY THANKFUL PEOPLE BECOME A SOURCE OF BLESSING TO MANY.**

I don't know who wrote this but I like the way the author sums up the purpose of spiritual gifts. However, we can apply it all the gifts we have received from God:

"You have your gifts not so much for your own sake as for the sake of others. You are like an apple tree that produces fruit not for its own consumption but for the consumption of others. Your gifts are given so you can bless others by ministering to them. If you have the gift of teaching, you have it so others in the body will be taught. If you have the gift of hospitality, it is because others need the gracious welcome they receive from you. If even one gifted person fails to function, the body of Christ is deprived of a ministry it needs to function well."

Again you may want the self-test I use; When I look at my day-planner, my checkbook, and my credit card statement, how much do they demonstrate how thankful to God I am?