

Leviticus 8-10

Trinity Church Golden Grove

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Introduction

It's not what you know, but who. The same idea lies behind Leviticus 8-10.

Sure, there is lots to know, what you know is important - just because you know a teacher, doesn't mean you can get a job as one. But, the person you know, does make all the difference. For God's people, in Leviticus, they need a mediator. A go-between. They need a priest - someone to offer sacrifices, to maintain the ongoing relationship with their God. It's who know you.

Chapters today, tell us the ordination of Priests and why it matters, explain how the priests help the people worship God. But then, they give us a confronting, jarring, reality of what happens when leaders of God's people fail to be theologically discerning and holy.

Story So Far

Exodus 35-40: Tent Of Meeting Built. God's space on earth, amongst his people. Can't go in; sinful and unclean. How can a holy God live with unholy people?

Leviticus 1-7: How to maintain the relationship with God; saved in Exodus, law in Leviticus, shows how to live with a holy God, through sacrifices that say sorry and thank you. Purpose of this, is to enjoy and worship God in the splendour of his holiness. For this to happen, we need someone who is set apart, a priest, for the task of taking my sin offering, my thank you offering, and going into the presence of God, on my behalf;

Leviticus 8

You need priestly mediator to worship God.

At the end of Ch 8 we read, 'Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord commanded.' What they do, in 35 long verses, taking 7 days to complete, is a ritual to set the Priests apart from others, ready for serving God, just the way God outlines. People don't seem to like ritual, especially religions ones. We mistake ritual with legalism and think there is no freedom in ritual. You know rituals are part of our life. They mark a time or event as unique.

- Anzac day, dawn service
- Birthday celebration
- A first date may involve flowers

- Getting married – many flowers. And food for our closest family and friends, fancy clothes and a bad speeches from that uncle

See, first date is special, but the wedding ceremony is much more elaborate. The more elaborate the ritual, the more significant attached to it. Just watch a Windsor get married or see one of those proposals at the footy on the big screen. In Leviticus 8, these rituals are elaborate and big and fancy and weighty – showing the people how serious the task of being holy is. A priest, approaching our Holy God without being set apart, ritually clean, would be like going out in 46 degree heat without sunscreen – You’d get horrible burnt.

Leviticus 9

Ritual leads to joyful worship and a holy fear of God.

Look at 9:4, “Today, the Lord will appear to you.” He will open the door of his tent and his glory will be seen, 9:6. All of this, so they can meet their king, the Lord God. Which is what happens in 9:23, with unique moment – Moses and Aaron go into the tent of meeting! 9 chapters, a week of preparation, sin atoned for, friendship sought – and now they can access God’s presence on earth.

Look what happens next. When Aaron and Moses come out of the tent, the glory of the Lord follows behind, and fire, typical of God’s presence, consumes all the stuff on the alter, 9:24. It’s a huge, massive display of glory and power and that God is satisfied with his people.

They shout for joy. But it was mixed with fear and shock because they saw and felt the holiness of God, right in front of them. They fell face down, the image of the fire burned into their eyes for the rest of their days.

See, faith in God, is about taking joy in God’s presence, and keeping his holiness alive in our minds.

What happens when we don’t consider God’s holiness, is exactly what takes place in chapter 10.

Leviticus 10

The priests offer unholy fire.

You can’t just presume upon God’s holiness. You can’t worship God anyway you want to. You can’t forget he is holy. Two of Aarons Sons, Nadab and Abihu add fire to their censers, thinking that it will add something to worship. But, 10:2, “fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

This is really intense: Is God is more concerned with ritual than people? Maybe they just want to make the worship a little more lively, relevant or edgy? Consider: Who are they and what are they doing? Priests. In ch 8 they have spent 7 days getting ready to approach God, Made ritually holy. And, unlike the repeated phrase of ch 8-9, says, ‘they did as the Lord commanded’. The emphasis here is on what Nadab and Abihu wanted to do.

That is, they have defiant motives because they offer unauthorised fire to God. They are not being faithful. It's like they are barging into the very throne room of God. 10:3 tells us it was a sign of disrespect - saying those who approach God, referencing the Priests, will be consecrated. "Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured."

They are not worshipping to God on his terms, they are not offering God what he's asked for. See, if the priests won't set themselves apart by their actions, then, God will remind all the people of his glory in the death of the priests.

This here is the haunting paradox of God's holiness - the goodness of God can be dangerous to those who rebel. Which is why ch 8 goes into such detail about the ritual, to show us how we must be careful to approach God, but his grace is that he wants us too.

If this story is uncomfortable to us, it is only because we no longer have a biblical and realistic view of the seriousness of our sin and God's holiness.

We drift into relativism too easily today. We approach God thinking, it doesn't matter how I live, after all, God loves me and that's all that matters. But this is a deficient view of God's character. True grace from God, results in changed lives of holiness and justice. Being consecrated as priests should have informed how they acted towards the Holy One.

Leadership enhances judgment! It is a privilege to lead. You can't abuse it without serious consequences. This is a graphic reminder that priests of later centuries needed to learn - you can't offer something unholy to their holy God. Even today, ministers must fulfil their ministry in the way God describes. After all, Captains can endanger the entire ship if they are reckless. Even this last week, think of the Tex Walker situation - his comments have had huge ramifications for lots of people and organisations. His status made this all the more problematic. From churches to politics, schools and non-profits - when leaders abuse their position, authority and status in any way, it's horrendous. And if we recognise this between humans, why would it be different between those set apart to mediate between people and God?

The priests, leaders, ministers, pastors, they have a duty to follow God exactly. As 10:3 says. they must keep the instructions themselves. This is always the case. And, it's honestly, fearful! 1 Timothy 4:16 says that ministers are to watch over their teaching and way of life carefully, because if you do, you will save yourself and your hearers. Being faithful in matters, it matters for the sake of eternity, for everyone listening and, for the one preaching.

God requires in all his people holiness, but especially his ministers, because of His own nature and perfections.

Because without holiness, no one will see the Lord. You will see very impressive people. And hear informative and motivational talks. And experience music that resonates in your soul. And have

people from all walks of life come into your building through events. You will hear political opinions and cultural analysis.

But do you hear about God's holiness?

Which is why in 10:8-11, another unique moment happens. The Lord speaks directly to Aaron. The only time he ever does this, reinforcing how priests are to conduct themselves while on duty:

10:8-11, "Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, so that you can distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and so you can teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses."

It's a reminder of what being a leader of God's people looks like. God wants to drill this into the mind of Aaron. And it begins with a warning, in light of what's just happened. Don't drink wine or beer while on duty. Why? A drunk priest isn't a good priest. Their duty is so weighty that to slip up, like Nadab and Abihu would mean death. Again, it shows God's grace. He doesn't want them to take risks. Just pause the wine with dinner for a moment. It won't kill you, but if you slip up, it will. The reason is so that the priests could tell the difference between holy and common. That is, they have to teach the people what is acceptable worship. This means teach the people God laws; which comes from God's character. He's holy, be holy, live holy, offer him holy things and live a holy, joyful life. All of this underscores that the heart of God is:

Heart of God

To be worshipped in holiness.

This really should be a positive, landmark moment for the people. After all, a priest has a beautiful role to play in the community; to bring people to God. This is what happens, God sets the priests apart as a go-between for Himself and the people. However, God's majesty and holiness and splendour mean that we are always in need of his mercy. The sins of the people is never far behind their worship, like Nadab and Abihu.

Sadly, some of you have felt the sins of priests, of leaders in the church. Their unholy actions have affected you. And God will hold them to account for their sins. Those who have done this, they have not heard clearly the words of 10:8-10 - To be holy, to know what clean and unclean are and to teach the people. They have become drunk with power, sin and unholiness, harming those God loves. This is horrible.

Nadab and Abihu were everything you don't want in a priest. They minimised sin and made up their own rules for worship. But, they are not where you value and worth lies - in the sins and deficiencies of others.

There is a good priest.

A mediator who understands a life of temptation, but never gave in. One who has experienced pain and loss, and who can sympathise with you and the struggle. You have a mediator, not on earth, but in God's space, in heaven, right now, the good, holy, kind, priest, Jesus - who goes between God and you, whose offering of himself is able to cleanse you, making you holy in his eyes, so that you can worship God in the splendour of his holiness. God delights in being worshipped in holiness, and It happens today, through Jesus.

This is the how much more of Jesus today - Jesus is our priestly mediator.

Jesus Priestly Mediator

I said at the start, not what you know but who. That's still true today.

Do you know Jesus? As a priest he offers the greatest sacrifice - his own body - and he lives forever to mediate for his redeemed people and will continue to carrying out his office of mediator and priest, before God the Father, appealing to his wounds (1 John 2:1-2) as the sacrifice we need. As priest, he continues to bring our needs before God the father, even now. Yes, our needs for healing and wisdom. For sacrifice and atonement for another weary day, a day filled with the temptation to sin.

A day where you just want to say thank you.

A day where you don't feel holy.

A day when life is hard.

In all those days and more, you have a priest, before the holy one, who fulfils this awesome responsibility. You can rest in his mediation, knowing you are holy and loved. And that's concrete hope. We need that. We need to feel both the fear and weight of approaching a holy God, trembling in his presence, and his glory, but, to feel the heat of his fire, rushing past us, because Jesus was sacrificed on the Cross, so we can see the glory of the Lord and be at peace with him. Yet, he is the holy one of God, who can't defile himself, who always keep God's glory before his eyes. Which means we can shout for joy, like the people did. But do so with proper reverence and even fear of the Lord. This fear isn't meant to bend us, like a piece of metal into something new, like in moralism, fear becomes a motivation to obey for fear of consequences. But, proper fear is more like melting into a new shape. A softening of us, a humbling, a joyful realisation of the sovereignty of God.

Think of it like the fear of meeting someone you highly respect - an academic in their field, an olympian, well, once they get out of quarantine! Or holding something valuable. Like a vase or child. This is a fear of disrespect, or not wanting to make something wonderful, unholy, by my actions. This is a good fear, a fear that keeps the thing in perspective to me, a not wanting to disrespect, harm or make unholy. That's the fear of God's people.

That we, would do anything, to undermine his majesty and holiness In our life and the lives of others. This means, that we don't look to an alter on fire to be reminded of God's greatness and glory. But by fixing our thoughts on Jesus. Hebrews 3:1-2, "Holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house

Unless we fix our minds with on God's greatness and holiness, as revealed in Jesus, then our worship will be unholy fire. A little later in Hebrews, 12:28-29 it says that God is a consuming fire, picking up these Leviticus verses. And it is here, at the intersection of our holy God's fire and love, that true worship happens, with joy, knowing that our God, in Jesus, is humble and gentle, allowing us to sit at his blessed feet and that he puts his tender arm around us.

We need a mediator.

Thank God we have one in Jesus.

Keep your eyes fixed on him.