

PEACEMEAL

Leviticus 19.1-2,5-6 & John 6.1-13

A lot of us probably found ourselves at a barbecue on Monday night for 4th of July.

Get-togethers like that are always interesting in one regard, because, of course, the polite thing to do if you're attending someone's home is to offer to bring something. That's sort of our casual, barbecue culture. And, I'll tell you, the hardest thing to bring, the assignment you don't want to get is **soda**. When someone says, "Oh bring some soda," you're in trouble. Because soda loyalties run deep. If you bring Mr. Pibb over to a Dr. Pepper house, you're in for it.

But, the problem is, you're standing there in the soda aisle at the store, and there's just a wall of options for you. There's like dozens of sodas. Do you bring cans? Do you bring 2 liters? Do you bring diet AND regular? Do you bring Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola? Do you get like a 5 gallon thing of Shasta for like 39 cents or 4 single bottles of root-beer that cost 8 dollars? It's just a mess. But you've got to show up with something. It's your offering for the party and it's something you and the other guests are going to enjoy together.

Turn with me if you will, over to the book of Leviticus, chapter 19. There's a simple devotional here I'd like for us to think about tonight. Now, Leviticus can be a little scary to us. At least it is to me! Because we're *not* Jews. And the Mosaic Law that the people of Israel were under does not apply to us today. And so, it can be hard for us to really grab hold of some of these things since they're so far removed from our own culture and tradition.

However, there are commands and principles given in the Mosaic Law that are repeated in the New Testament, which we'll see in a moment. But more than that, even in a legal book like this one, we're able to see God revealing His heart and His nature to us and demonstrating how much He wants to reach out to you and me and the people of the earth.

But look there at the first two verses of Leviticus chapter 19, where it says:

Leviticus 19.1-2 - And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"

That phrase is probably familiar to most of us because that is a command that continues over into the New Testament and the Church age. In fact, we're given this command as Christians a number of times. Peter repeats it verbatim in 1 Peter 1.15-16. Paul says it in Ephesians 1, verse 4. Also, in Hebrews we read this:

Hebrews 12.14 - Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

So it's safe to say that this idea is pretty important. But I think this is one of those areas that we don't always have a great handle on. We've heard about how the word 'holy' means 'set apart'

or 'sanctified', but I know for myself that this idea of holiness often gets reduced down to simply personal purity. Avoiding sin. And, while that is an important part of what God intends for us when He says, "Be holy for I am holy," there's a lot more there for us to understand. There's a lot more grace and goodness and abundance from God included in this command.

And that's what's so great about Leviticus 19. Because God, speaking to His people, opens up this chapter and says, "BE HOLY!" And then He explains some of the different ways that we do that. If you read through those following verses you see the Lord talking about holiness in our family relationships and in our worship practices. How we're to view possessions and the way we talk to others. How we work and plant and harvest. How we interact with the poor. And you see all this stuff and really quickly realize that this holiness we're called to as God's people is an all-encompassing lifestyle and mindset. It's not just about avoiding the lust of the eyes. There's a lot more to it.

There's one facet to holiness that I want to look at in verses 5 and 6. There we read:

Leviticus 19.5-6 - And if you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it of your own free will. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire.

So, in regard to living a life that is holy, God talks about what is known as the peace offering.

Under Levitical Law there were a number of different offerings. The sin offering, the burnt offering, the trespass offering, the meal offering and the peace offering. All of them were representative of Christ in His sacrifice for us, but of course, they also had benefits for the person bringing the offering.

Again, I know at least I am prone to culturally or subconsciously think of animal sacrifices as appeasing an angry god. But that's not what these were about. Sacrifices didn't save you. They provided atonement and demonstrated your submission so that relationship between God and man could be made right. God's grace saved you, through faith, and then offerings were brought in response to God so that man could have right standing before Him. It was a relational thing. Which is why we're still invited in the New Testament Church Age to present offerings to God. Sacrifices of praise, offerings of time and talent and treasure.

Romans 12.1 - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

It's about our relationship to God. And here in Leviticus, as God calls His people to be holy, He talks to them about the peace offering.

Now, the peace offering was a little different than some of the others. For example, there weren't as many restrictions on it. It could be a bull, a sheep, a goat, a male or a female. It was still to be without spot or blemish. But what you would do is bring your peace offering, which would be butchered down, then the best part of the animal, the richest, most prized portion, would be burned up on the altar. That went to God. The shoulder and the breast went to the priest and then the rest was for you and your family to eat together. You had a joyous, sacred picnic. Because the peace offering was a sacrifice of gratitude and praise to God. But, in

response to that gratitude and praise, the Lord then poured back blessing and provision to you. It's really a beautiful thing.

I hear the term 'peace offering' and I immediately starting thinking that it means a person has to 'make peace with God' before they get melted by His wrath. But that's not what this was about.

Here's what Bible commentator J.A. Seiss says about this term:

*"The word 'peace' in the language of the Scriptures, has a shade of meaning not commonly attached to it in ordinary use. With most persons it signifies a cessation of hostilities...the absence of disturbance. But in the Scriptures it means more. Its predominant import there is **prosperity, welfare, joy, happiness.**"*

"We may therefore confidently take the peace-offering as a joyous festival, a solemn sacrificial banqueting, illustrative of the peace and joy which flows to believers from the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So the Lord comes to His people and says, "Be holy because I am holy," and then one of the ways He gives us to do that is by bringing a sacrifice of gratitude and having a picnic with Him.

It reminds me of one of Jesus' more famous miracles. It's recorded in all 4 Gospels. We'll read it in John chapter 6. Jesus feeds the 5,000. But, as we read this, think about the peace offering.

It's 13 verses, so you can follow along as I read it aloud.

John 6.1-13 - After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

To me, that's a great representation of the peace offering. Jesus was there in a deserted place, teaching the people and sharing about the Kingdom of God and healing the sick. And then, this young boy comes to them and says, "Here. Take my loaves. Take my fish. I know it's nothing in this sea of people, but You can have it." That which was most valuable and tender and important was given to the Lord. And then, in return, Jesus poured out to the people and they had a meal together.

And as we look at what the peace offering was and then read this famous story and sort of compare the two, it starts to help me understand more of what holiness is about. Not just avoiding sin, though that is essential, but understanding more the relationship of holiness. I hear that word and I immediately think of the phrase 'set apart', but these texts together are starting to help me think of my personal holiness as being about setting myself *before* God. Because what God is looking for is our submission, yes, but He's also looking to just sit and have a meal with us. Look at the peace offering. Think about how Jesus instituted communion. Or verses like Revelation 3:20:

Revelation 3.20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

That's the kind of relationship that Jesus keeps referencing. Even back in Leviticus. He says, "*BE HOLY! For I am holy!*" And then He explains how to do that and one of the ways is to bring this peace offering. Where you came and honored God for what He's done and had a little picnic with Him.

So this is what God wants. And we're confident in that. All over the Scriptures we see this same idea presented again and again. God having meals with Abraham and meals in the Tabernacle. Jesus having the Last Supper with His disciples and a meal with the 2 believers walking on the road to Emmaus. There's a wedding banquet in heaven when the Church is finally reunited with the Lord. And God is revealing over and over to us that He's not an angry deity that must be appeased, but an intimate Savior and Friend who really wants to spend time with you.

But we've got to figure out how we apply what we've seen here. How do we get ourselves into this kind of holiness? How do we reciprocate what God has done?

First, let's think about our verses in Leviticus.

Leviticus 19.5-6 - And if you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it of your own free will. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire.

Remember, the peace offering was a voluntary offering. It was given of your own free will. And it was to be a sacrifice of gratitude and praise to the Lord for what He's done.

And that ministered to me because often I'm thankful to the Lord for what He's done in my life and what He's doing. But I realized that that thankfulness doesn't always lead me to worship or to sacrifice. And, of course, the Lord loves a thankful heart. I'm not knocking that. But I had to ask myself if my *gratitude* for what God does in my life ever moves me into voluntary *action*? To go back to our party analogy at the beginning of our study, it's not a great one, but since the

Lord has opened up a spot for me at His party, am I willing to bring anything? Accepting the invitation is one thing, saying “What can I bring?” is another. God has invited me to be a part of His family and now I have the opportunity to bring something to honor Him, bless Him and bless others. But I’m free to not do that as well. And it’s a challenging thing for me to ask myself what I’ve set before God in response to the blessing and the salvation He’s given to me. Am I living out Romans 12 verse 1 or have I kept my life off the altar and off the cross?

Second, there in Leviticus, the sacrifice was to be eaten. And it was to be a joyous, celebratory thing. The question that arises there is: Am I enjoying my relationship with God? Because that’s what He wants. He *wants* us to have joy. And so, if I find a lack of enjoyment, a lack of excitement, a lack of cheer in my Christianity, then something’s wrong. Because that’s not what God intends. And I need to figure out where that holy relationship has weakened or broken down and allow the Lord can repair it. Because God wants us to enjoy our relationship with Him *right now!*

And then, third in Leviticus, there was to be a quick participation in this specific meal. When you brought your peace offering, the Lord said, “Hey, let’s do this right now! Let’s spend time together right now.” There was a window of interaction that closed after 3 days.

And as we see the Christian life described in the Bible, we learn that the Lord brings us opportunities to worship or to offer something to Him or to do a work for Him or to hear what He’s speaking to us, and those opportunities will pass. There’s a time where God comes to us and says, “Now is the time to enter this land.” And we can miss it. Not in the sense that we’d lose our salvation or ruin our lives or anything like that. But there are specific moments that God presents before you for worship or ministry or learning, and if we’re not paying attention, if we’re distracted, or if we’re too self-centered to set our lives before Him, then we will miss much of the goodness and blessing that God wants to pour out to us.

That’s why the feeding of the 5,000 is so great. This kid coming to Jesus with some meager lunch, but saying, “Take it. I want you to have this. I just want to be with You and honor You for what You’ve taught and all the miracles You’ve been working.” And in response to *that* response, Jesus has a meal with them. And what’s interesting is that we saw in John 6, verse 6, that Jesus knew what He was going to do, but He waited so that He could give an opportunity for the people to be involved. One person set himself before Jesus and then this incredible miracle was performed. The Lord waits to see if we open our lives to Him.

And this is a type of your life and my life. All throughout the Bible God explains to us that His desire is to do incredible things in the lives of His people. His desire is to bring incredible transformation and use us to impact the lives of other people all over the world. He has gifts and opportunities and callings and empowerings for us. But He waits to see if we will sit down to dinner with Him. He waits to see what we’re offering to Him. Because He will let us keep our 5 loaves and 2 fish to ourselves, because He’s gracious. But if we’re willing to buy into this idea of holiness that God talks about in Leviticus, if we’re willing to *act* in response to who He is and what He’s done, then remarkable things will happen in us and through us.

But it’s the response we need to wrestle with in our lives. Because having a thankful heart is one thing (and it’s a good thing). Being in the presence of Jesus is one thing. *Responding* to Jesus and what He’s given to us is something else. That’s what makes a believer a disciple.

So, tonight, I invite each of us to just pray for a few minutes, evaluating our personal holiness. Because holiness in God's eyes is an active interaction as we set our lives before Him and He then pours out His will and His power on us. And we should ask the Lord to do something with the sacrifice of our lives. We're not looking for an experience, but we're looking for the intimacy that God talks about again and again in His word. So let's take a moment to submit ourselves to God and allow Him to set our lives apart. And then let's spend the rest of our night worshiping Him for who He is and what He's done for us.

Because God loves you and He wants to do something in your life. Maybe you think your life is meager. Maybe you feel like your life is 5 stale loaves of bread and 2 desert-temperature fish. But Jesus can take your life and impact thousands of people. Millions of people have been ministered to because this kid was willing to donate his lunch and have a picnic with Jesus. Because he set himself before the Lord. So, let's recognize what God has done on our behalf, submit ourselves to His rule and then offer our lives as a willing sacrifice to whatever He desires. And let's just spend some time with Him. Because that's what He wants, and we want what He wants.