

A Sacrifice for God

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- [0 : 00] The cost of living in Australia is among the highest in the world. It's very expensive. As you can see there in the picture, Australia is red.
- So it's among the 20 countries with the highest cost of living in the world. Why are we here? I keep asking myself that question as I often look back to the low cost of living in Indonesia.
- Why did I even move here? As you can see there, Indonesia is green, which is among the cheapest in the whole world. But for me, the reason why I'm here is obvious.
- My wife and son are here. So living here with them is worth the cost. Now the question is, how much would you pay to live with God?
- How much is living with God worth for you? Keep these questions in mind as we go through Leviticus 1 together. As we've heard from Andrew last week, the book of Leviticus starts with God and his people not really being able to live together.
- [1 : 28] God dwells in the tabernacle in the midst of the Israelite camp. But at this point, as verse 1 here says, God had to speak from the tabernacle to Moses because there was no way for God and his people to meet in the tabernacle.
- The problem was the sin of the people, which caused a gulf between them and God. Remember the oil and water illustration from last week.
- The holy God could not mix with the sinful people. And several things needed to be done to bridge that gulf again. So in the book of Leviticus, we will also see several different kinds of offerings that cover the several things that needed to be done for God to live with his people, to bridge that gulf.
- There are offerings to erase guilt. Offerings to atone for sins. And here in chapter 1, God gives the Israelites burnt offerings.
- Which are to be done every day, just as Numbers 28 indicates. And one of the functions of burnt offerings is to please God.
- [2 : 54] Sometimes it's done just because the people want to express the worth of God, you know, to please him. Other times, like here in Leviticus 1, it's done to appease God's anger.
- So that his people might be reconciled to God. So that a bridge between God and his people might at least start to be rebuilt.
- But as you might expect, building that bridge is not easy. In fact, the burnt offerings are very costly.
- First, we can see the high cost in the kind of meat that has to be offered. Three different kinds of animals are allowed to be offered as burnt offerings. So in verse 2, the offered animals must come from the herd.
- That is, cows. If the worshipper is rich and is able to afford cow. Or the flock.
- [4 : 01] That is, sheep or goats. If the worshipper has some means but not rich. And you can see in verse 14 that if the worshipper is poor, they can offer doves or young pigeons, a bird.

The point is that these animals have to be either raised or bought. They have to cost something. The people can't offer wild animals because wild animals cost nothing.

These offerings must be costly. And second, meat was a rare luxury in those times for all except the very, very rich.

Most people only ate vegetables or grains or bread for their daily meals. And they saved the animals only for very rare occasions. But here God demands only animals.

And not just regular animals but the very best. In verse 3 and 10, only males were to be offered. During those times, male animals were more expensive.

[5 : 18] Merely because they were able to impregnate multiple females at the same time. And so people only needed to keep one or two male animals for a large number of females.

But here, only male animals were allowed to be sacrificed. The one or two that people own, they're to be sacrificed. And not only that.

Only unblemished males were allowed. This is the most expensive meat. In modern terms, God demands only the Wagyu.

These burnt offerings are very, very costly. And not to mention the difficulty of bringing these animals to the tabernacle. Can you imagine?

This is a map of the Israelite camp. There's the tabernacle there in the middle where God dwells. Now imagine living on the furthest side of the camp.

[6 : 22] With tens of 150 to 200,000 people between you and the tabernacle. And then you have to drag a lamb across.

And then you arrive there in the courtyard of the tabernacle. Not having eaten meat for some time. And then you smell the barbecue scent. But then you have to burn the entire animal that you just brought.

And never get to enjoy it. The burnt offerings are very costly. And not to mention the elaborate bloody procedures in making these offerings.

First, the worshiper has to lay their hands on the animal in verse 4. This is so that the animal might be accepted on their behalf to make atonement for them.

As I've said before, sin is the problem that caused a gulf between God and his people. And sin has its consequences.

[7 : 33] The wages of sin is death. That's because sin dishonors God. And God is the most worthy and glorious and honorable being.

And so dishonoring him means having to face the greatest punishment of all. Death. And so to appease God's anger, the worshiper has to face the consequences of their sin.

Every Israelite needs to die. But out of his graciousness, God provides another way for his anger to be appeased and for the people's sins to be paid for.

Through transferring their sins to these animals when they lay their hands on these animals to be sacrificed. And so every time the worshiper does the next steps in verses 5 to 6, as they slaughter the animal, as they skin the animal, and as they cut the animal into pieces, they have to face the fact that what this animal is going through is what they should be facing as the consequences of their sin.

But because God provides another way, they're not facing those consequences. And then lastly, the worshiper needs to wash the feet and the internal organs of the animal in verse 9 and verse 13.

[9 : 07] That's to wash away the dung, to make the offering pure. These procedures are elaborate and bloody.

And not only for the worshiper, but also for the priests. In verse 3 and 4, the priests have to first examine the perfectness of the animal, and then accept the sacrifice on God's behalf.

And then after the animal is killed, in verse 5 and 11, the priests have to catch the blood and splash it on the altar. In verse 7, the priests need to arrange the altar and put the fire on.

And then in verse 8 and 12, the priests are to arrange the already cut meat pieces on the altar. And for the poor, in verse 15 to 17, the priests have to do everything from wringing off the head of the bird, draining the blood, removing the crop, tearing the bird open by the wings without dividing it completely, and then burning it.

It sounds like a very difficult job. Imagine accidentally dividing a bird completely as you tear the bird open by the wings, and then you go, have you gotten another one?

[10 : 37] And they go, we're poor, mate. We haven't even had meat for six months. These offerings are not only costly, but also very difficult to do, very time-consuming, very elaborate and very bloody.

Because these offerings show the cost that needs to be paid for people to live with God, for that gulf to be breached.

And living with God is costly because of who God is. We can see there in the passage that, first, this God is holy.

He is hard to approach. Leviticus 1 doesn't show a fickle God who is angry one minute and then easily pleased by food like a toddler.

No, it shows a holy God who takes sin seriously because He is the most worthy, most noble, most holy and pure and glorious.

[11 : 44] And therefore, second, these offerings also show that God is worthy of our best. God is worth every animal and every effort and every bloody spot on their clothes.

It's worth doing every detail that is needed for the Israelites to approach Him. And this is important because as God wants to dwell with them and as He provides them with these means, they too must desire to dwell with God to be prepared to pay these costs.

Without knowing God's worth, without desiring to live with this God, the Israelites won't be prepared to pay for all this or doing all these things, elaborate procedures.

But here's the problem that you might have noticed. God is worthy of our best, sure, but is our best enough?

Although all these animals are costly from the perspective of the Israelites, in reality, as Michelle has shown earlier, they're worth nothing compared to the infinite worth of God.

[13 : 13] We pay \$1,800 to live with God, really? That would be like insulting King Charles on his face and spitting on him only to say afterwards, whoops, sorry King, here, take this lamb kebab as a payment.

Offensive, right? And so here, third, we see that the God who takes sin seriously and is hard to approach and is infinitely worthy is also the God who is so gracious.

God is so gracious that he's willing to overlook the relatively cheap sacrifice that's not worth his glory and accept the offender back into his arms.

When you read this passage, you might see a God who's all about rules. But if you think about it, God is so gracious that he's the one who initiates this reconciliation.

He's the one who called Moses in verse 1. It's not that Moses or the Israelites said they wanted to come to God bringing all these offerings.

[14 : 28] No. It's God who opens the way. God's graciousness is also pictured in the way he provides different ways for people with different socio-economic status to come to him.

so that not only the rich can come, but even the poor can just bring a bird for payment to dwell with him, to have a relationship with him.

And if you think about it, the priest's role in the Old Testament is not only to represent the people to God, but also represent God to the people.

And so the priest's elaborate role here in this passage also shows God's willingness to meet the people in graciousness.

So it's like this. God is the one offended, but he's the one giving them the means for reconciliation that involves cheap costs that are not worth his glory, his infinite glory.

[15 : 40] God is so gracious. The Jews knew exactly how gracious their God was. Even the basis of their obedience in doing all these elaborate procedures was grace.

Their God freed them out of grace out of Egypt. Even before they did all these things. that their God was, as Exodus 34 says, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

So the Jews knew that their obedience was not to win God's favor, but their obedience was so that they could enjoy relationship with God to finally be able to dwell with him.

Still, the problem persists. God's infinite worth that is offended by sins cannot be appeased by animals. Even though these animals are very costly to the Israelites, compared to God's infinite worth, these are just animals.

So how do we reconcile God's infinite worth that makes him angry at sin and God's gracious mercy that makes him overlook sin?

[17 : 15] The answer is Jesus. In Hebrews 7, Jesus is the priest that does everything required on our behalf and on God's behalf.

Jesus is the true high priest who is prepared to do all the bloody and elaborate procedures so that we can dwell with God.

In fact, Jesus did those bloody and elaborate procedures alone, without our help, and on his own body.

This is where God showed his abounding grace. when he provided for us the ultimate sacrifice, his own beloved son, the only one that is worth God's infinite worth, because he is God.

Jesus is the true sacrifice. As 1 Peter says, we are not redeemed with perishable things, but with the blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

[18 : 30] He is the true sacrifice because he is the only one that is without blemish or defect. Or as Ephesians 5 says, Christ gave himself up as a fragrant offering to God.

He's the only one, he's the true burnt offering, because he is the only one that is worth God's worth. In the cross, God's wrath, because of his infinite worth, and God's gracious mercy, meet.

Remember the question that I asked at the beginning of my sermon. If we were to ask God, how much would you pay God to live with us?

He would say, this much, and point at the cross, my own beloved son. How do you react to that?

You might react like the ancient Egyptians, those who had seen what the God of Israel could do, and how gracious he was in liberating his people out of slavery?

[19 : 57] But the Egyptians did not know, or did not want to know about this God. They did not care about all these gracious means that God had provided for people to come to him.

And they're busy worshipping their own gods, and busy trying to please them instead of this gracious God. You might react like that, and just don't care about this God.

And you prefer instead your own gods, the God of beauty, the God of sex, the God of money, the gods of self-desire, or the gods of self-improvements, or the gods of self-expression.

But, if you react like the pagans, you will find the sort of gods who are not gracious. In fact, those gods will demand your soul, but will never give their all in return.

Those gods will consume you and demand you as a sacrifice, but they will never sacrifice themselves and let themselves be consumed like this God in Christ.

[21 : 17] Or you might react like the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Those who knew the gracious God, who gave them these Levitical laws out of graciousness, but those Pharisees then turned these laws into their own performance indicators to try to win God's favor all over again.

you might react like that. And instead of just receiving God's gracious love and embracing Him, you might turn every God's gift into a means for you to prove yourself and to prove your worth and to prove the worth of your works and to prove the worth of your ministry and service.

But if you do that, you'll find that your worth and the worth of your works will never amount to God's infinite worth. Or, you might choose to embrace this God of graciousness who's merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and trust, trust His way, which He has provided to give us a path to have a relationship with Him.

And that way, for us, is Christ, who is infinitely better than the Old Testament way. You might choose to trust in Christ and not rely on your works.

If you do react like this, not only once in conversion, but also every single day, as you sin every day and go to Him to ask for mercy every day and go to Him to appease His anger every day, just like the Israelites here bringing their offerings every day, you will find that God's mercy runs deep, deeper than you might expect.

[23 : 26] And He is indeed slow to anger, slower than you might expect. And the blood of Christ is worthy, more worthy than you expect, infinitely worthy to pay for all your sins every single day and to pay for the sins of the whole world.

But if you do choose to embrace Christ, know that trusting in Christ is not less costly than giving these burnt offerings. Although God has paid for everything for us to enter into a relationship with Him, entering into that relationship demands a full commitment from us, and that is costly.

As one hymn says, it demands my soul, my life, my all. True worship has always demanded a lot in the Old Testament or in the New.

as Romans 12 says, therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Or in Hebrews 13, through Jesus therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess His name.

[24 : 59] and do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. This is not to say that our works are added to what Jesus has done.

No, God has provided everything needed in Christ. In this relationship, God has gone the whole way to meet us.

what we need to do is just to embrace Him. But embracing in this relationship takes a commitment.

And that commitment takes our whole soul, our whole life, our all. God in his book, The Prodigal God, American Pastor Tim Keller shares a story of a woman who started going to his church.

She said she had gone to church growing up and she had always heard that God accepts her only if she's sufficiently good and ethical.

[26 : 12] she had never heard the true gospel message that God is gracious and she could be accepted by God by sheer grace through Christ.

And she said, that's a scary idea. Oh, good scary, but scary. So Keller asked, why would unmerited free grace be scary?

And she replied, if I was saved by my good works, then there would be no limit, no, sorry, there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through.

I would be like a taxpayer with rights. I would have done my duty and now I will deserve a certain quality of life. But if it's really true that I am a sinner saved by sheer grace at God's infinite cost, then there's nothing he cannot ask of me.

And then Keller writes, she could see immediately that the wonderful beyond belief teaching of salvation by sheer grace had two edges to it.

[27 : 30] God's grace is free, yes, but it's also costly, infinitely so. friends, God has paid for the total infinite cost for us to live with him.

We don't need to bring a bull anymore. It's all paid for. Are you prepared to pay the cost of commitment of living with him?

The Old Testament people of God were prepared to bring all these expensive animals and do all this elaborate bloody procedures to live with God in their tents. We have something infinitely better.

Jesus is our high priest who has done all, all of the bloody elaborate procedures so that we can live with God and who has sacrificed himself for us to live with God.

Are you prepared to pay the cost? to dedicate your whole life, all of your work, all of your money, all of your days, all of your singing voice and musical talents, all of your children and grandchildren, all of your time, all of your intelligence and scientific abilities, all of your desires, all of your minds, hearts and strength for him.

[29 : 09] Are you prepared to offer all this as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God? God of grace, you have shown us that you desire to live with us way more than we often desire to live with you, that you've paid the infinite cost to bridge the infinite gap between us and you, so that we might live with you and enjoy your infinite worth.

Thank you for giving us, Jesus, the true tabernacle, the true high priest and the true offering. Help us through your spirit to present our whole lives as a living sacrifice in union with Christ.

In Jesus, our high priest, we pray. Amen.