

Sermon October 23, 2021 Leviticus VI

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus we see how the Lord is establishing a new way to appear to his people and bless them. He had shown his presence to Israel as they fled Egypt. He used a cloud in the form of a pillar during the day. He used a pillar of fire at night. This must have had quite an effect on the people, and may well have offered some reassurance, but the cloud and the fire presented God in his power. It was time to know him as a Lord of grace and blessing.

I've covered some of the offerings that Moses instructed the people to bring before the Lord – the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the atonement offering, etc. The atonement offering came first and purified the people so they were able to come before the Lord and make the other offerings. Then they did make those sacrifices to God along with their prayers and thanksgivings. Finally, the priest announced that because of the offerings they had made the people now had God's grace and favor. Phew! What a relief. One could argue that the most important part of the whole shebang was that benediction pronounced by the priest. How did it go again?

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26**

This week some Haitian gangsters kidnapped a number of Christian missionary workers. As of this writing, the evil doers were asking one million dollars for each of the missionaries. Imagine you are one of the family back home. Let's say that between your savings account, GiveSendGo, friends, relatives, your rich uncle and the government, you scrape together the million. An emissary takes the money to the criminals. You are waiting back in the operations center. You wait, and wait, and wait. Finally you get the call that the captives are released, in good health, and they will be joining you in about an hour. The benediction pronounced by the priest after the sacrifices at the tent of meeting was like that phone call. You did what was asked. A benefit was promised. You were then assured you had the benefit. Phew. What a relief! This is how the process worked in the Old Testament.

Now enter Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ changes everything. Not only does he change everything, he makes everything better. He perfects it. Jesus brings the Old Testament service to its final goal – open access to God in the heavenly sanctuary. In the book of Hebrews it says that Jesus is the new and living way to the Father (Heb. 10:20). Jesus brings us into Trinitarian worship, as we worship the father through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Moses initiated the Old Testament priests before their service in the sanctuary. Jesus initiates us, and in baptism perfects us to approach God, worship him and serve him in the heavenly realms. God revealed his glory – his presence- at the temple in the fire and smoke at the altar. Now he hides his glory in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is revealed in the Word of God to his people. The location for the Old Testament service was the altar and the tent of meeting. Our new place of worship is Jesus Christ, where when two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is among them.

Our New Testament worship straddles earth and heaven. There is no need for another sacrifice of atonement, Jesus is our propitiation. We can enter directly into the presence of the Lord without fear, open our hearts to him, and receive his blessing.

The meal of the peace offering was not a major part of the temple events. Now, however, the Meal of Holy Communion is the highlight of our worship, where God reveals himself in the body and blood of Jesus, and where we still hear the exact same blessing spoken by Aaron and those who came after;

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26**

Thanks be to God and Jesus our Lord for giving us direct access to him in the heavenly realms, where we can draw close to him and him to us, blessing us to complete the priestly works of service he has prepared in advance for us to accomplish, and strengthening us to meet every obstacle, challenge and cross that lay on our earthly road. Amen.

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