

Ordained to Serve Leviticus 8

This past week we have been in prayer for the people of Japan. What a devastation the earthquake and the black wave of the tsunami caused. It is hard for us to imagine and understand the immensity of it all and the suffering. Unbelievable! Not only were whole towns and cities wiped out, the nuclear reactors that supply the energy to Japan and resource their first world economy, were shaken to the core, exploded, and began spewing out deadly radioactive material that can multiply death around the world for generations to come. And so it is right for us to be in prayer for the people of Japan and the people of the world. It is right for us to turn to God, to enter God's presence in worship and to pray. To pray for relief, pray for comfort, pray for generosity and a global desire to help. Pray for the church in Japan that they can be a candlestick of light in that dark culture of Japan during this time of crisis and despair and worry. This catastrophic event has been a wakeup call for people around the world. A time of global lent, global reflection and evaluation and hopefully global revival. So pray.

Lent is a 40 day period of preparation for that big day of revival, that great day of resurrection – that glorious day that turned the tide, and reversed the wave of sin's destruction. Something similar with the exact opposite effect of what happened in Japan happened on Good Friday. The black wave of sin was causing global devastation and death. But on Good Friday there was a sacrifice – an offering - a prayer cried out to end the plague and the suffering. There was an earthquake in the darkness, one man on a cross was killed, and the nuclear reactor of the universe was shaken to the core. There was a love explosion in the Holy of holies. The walls that contained the glory and power and holiness of God were torn open. The Holy of Holies curtain was ripped from top to bottom and the holiness of God, and the power of God and the healing isotopes of grace began radiating out from that center tabernacle core. That cloud- that emanating spirit that radiating light, that transforming Word coming from that center core in the holy of holies began spewing out the redemptive materials that would renew the earth, undo the curse over creation, bring healing and multiply life around the world for generations to come. Good Friday happened in God's way at the end of the Lenten life journey of Jesus, our high priest and Lamb of God.

Lent is a 40 day period of preparation for that glorious day that turns the tide of sin and welcomes people back into the presence of God and helps them experience God with us again. For that to happen according to God's plan in the OT, Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai listening to God and seeing the blueprint God had drawn up for the salvation of the world. In chapter 29 of Exodus verse 42 God summarized 15 chapters of instructions to Moses. God said: "For the generations to come this burnt offering I designed is to be made regularly at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you. There also I will meet with the Israelites and the place will be consecrated, sanctified by my glory. So, by obeying all these instructions

for worship, I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar, and will consecrate Aaron and his children to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among my people and be their God. They will know and experience that I am the Lord their God, who saved them from slavery and death so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.

The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe the fundamentals of this God ordained worship that mediates the healing love of God. The five offerings that please God and deal with the brokenness of sin. Today, moving on, we read Leviticus 8 – the first of seven chapters (not including chapter 10) describing the fundamentals of Holiness. The fundamentals of being separated for ministry. The fundamentals of being purified and consecrated and chosen for God's service and God's mission in the world. Today we read about the consecration - purification and ordination of the priests. The priests play a key role in mediating God and his forgiveness. And in chapters 11 – 15 God instructs his people how to be holy as he their God is holy.

Chapters 8 & 9 are special chapters in Leviticus. Of the 36 speeches God makes in Leviticus this is the only one where God addresses only Moses, and tells Moses what to do. God commands Moses to bring Aaron and his children and the tools and paraphernalia of ordination and purification to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And God also commands Moses to gather the entire assembly of Israel – that means everyone – young and old – they all had to watch. The only other time in Leviticus where the entire assembly is addressed is chapter 19. The “be holy as I the Lord your God am holy” chapter.

In chapters 8 & 9 we see Moses washing the would be priests with water, clothing them with priestly robes and ornaments, anointing them for service, sacrificing for them the sin offering, the burnt offering and the ordination grain offering as pleasing aroma offerings to God, in other words starting the system of providing for the priests, and then offering the fellow offerings of celebration, baptizing the priests and their robes with the blood of the sacrifice, and commanding them to remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days and seven nights. And finally in chapter 9 Moses tells the priest how to do their ministry exactly as God commands it. Ten times it says in these chapters that Moses did everything exactly as God commanded. And so with the offerings done exactly the way God said, and the priests ordained exactly the way God demanded, and the tent and the altar all purified, sanctified, sterilized for service the promise of God was fulfilled.

In chapter 9 verse 6. God promised: If you worship and serve and minister exactly as God design it The Glory and the blessings and the power of God will appear to you. And as we saw a few weeks ago. That is what happened - And the people shouted for joy and fell face down.

Now the reason I'm telling this is not just to perk your historical interest or to build you biblical knowledge. There are two reasons. 1. This pattern of mediating the love of God and the mercy of God is the exact pattern of Jesus ministry especially his passion. Jesus was washed, clothed, anointed, ordained and ministered exactly according to the pattern and will of God shown in blue print form to Moses. The only difference is Jesus was without sin and didn't need the purification rites performed over him. But even there God treated his lamb and his high priest as guilty. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become right with God." You see Jesus is our high priest. Jesus is the one who opens up the Holy of Holies and releases the love and mercy saturated winds of God grace and God power into our lives. Jesus is the pure and holy High priest who completed the atoning and death reversing sacrifice by allowing himself to be the burnt offering lamb of God.

That is reason number one. Studying these speeches of God in the book we love helps us understand and appreciate and love Jesus even more. Seeing the significance and immensity of what Jesus did for us motivates us even more to put our faith in him and respond to his invitation to live in him.

The second reason why studying these chapters in Leviticus is important is the fact that God has called us, the church, to be a nation of priests. Those of us who follow Jesus, and look to him as our sacrificial lamb and our High priest are God's priests today. Peter says in his first letter 2:4 "As you come to Jesus, who was chosen by God and precious to him, so you and I also are being built into a holy tent of meeting and a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. We who are the church today are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation to declare the praises of God" and to mediate the grace and glory of God in a broken and suffering world. Today, Peter continues, "we as holy priests abstain from our sinful desires and live pure and consecrated lives among the lost people of this world so that they may see our good deeds and glorify God" even in the midst of earth quakes and tsunami and nuclear reactor melt down.

One of the things about the OT priests is they had to wear an ephod when they did their ministry. An ephod is like a butcher's apron, it was the priest's work apron. On the shoulder of the ephod, according to Exodus 28, the priest carried two precious stones engraved with the names of the people of Israel, the people for whom they did their ministry. The idea was, according to Exodus 28: 13, that every time the priest did their ministry they would bear the names and the needs and the prayers for the people on their shoulders into the very presence of God. And that is still one of the key ministries of priests to today. And that is one of the reasons we pray for the people of Japan, and the people of Libya, and the people of the world. We are a nation of priests who minister to mediate the love, grace and mercy of God in a broken world.

In the passion chapters of the Gospel John (13 – 19) we see Jesus consecrating and purifying and ordaining and sanctifying his disciples for ministry. Jesus begins with the washing of their feet, clothing them with the robes of the spirit, explaining to them the goals and the ways of ministry, feeding the bread of fellowship, preparing them for the sacrifice that will be made on their behalf, and ordaining them for service. The last part of Jesus' Lenten preparation for his disciples is his high priestly prayer for them and the world.

Jesus prays in verse 15 “My prayer is not that you, O God, will take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they may be truly sanctified. I have given them the glory you gave me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you love me.” So send I you into the world, Jesus says to you and to me.

We are Christ's ambassadors, God's co-workers, priests, ordained to serve. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 20 that after Easter, after Jesus finished his work, and has sent us out into the world God is making his appeal and releasing the healing winds of his grace through us. The ministry of reconciliation and the ministry of atonement that births the new creation and makes peace with God and fosters God dwelling with us is committed to us. And so we pray as the OT priest and our high priest Jesus prayed.