

“High Priest of the Good Things That Have Come”

Leviticus 9:1-24; Hebrews 9:11-14

INTRO

Today, in many regions throughout our country, and in many other nations, God’s people are unable to worship together in a building. We are blessed to still be able to do so here in Saint Paul, MN. The novel coronavirus is a real threat to many, and we do not want to minimize it. I wanted to address it head on since so many of us are distracted and wondering (or worrying) about what normal life will be like in this pandemic. I can’t tell you what will happen, but I know that God is still on His throne, and He tells us to cast all our anxieties upon Him since He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). So, let us do that and place our anxious thoughts aside and in Gods’ care.

The message I have today emphasizes why we would want to worship together. In fact, what we celebrate in our corporate worship is something so rich that true Christians will not cease their worship if unable to meet together. They know that worship is not something done only in a temple or a church building, but as Jesus declared, we can “worship [God] in spirit and [in] truth” (John 4:24), and we can do this together in an auditorium or individually, in private or with our family.

Now some of us are self-proclaimed history buffs, and so we can’t stop comparing today’s outbreak with other events in the past such as the 1918 Spanish influenza or the scourge of the “Black Death” that ravaged Europe. So far, our present situation is mild compared to

either of those tragedies. For the message today, I’m going to go back in time even further than the middle ages. I want us to enter the world of Old Testament Israel and experience their first days of worshipping God together corporately as a nation. By contemplating events described in Leviticus we can gain a valuable perspective on what worship is and how privileged we truly are today to be God’s people.

So, let us pray and then look together at Leviticus chapter 9.

PRAY, READ: Leviticus 9:1-7

TITLE: “High Priest of the Good Things That Have Come”

- 1) Plan to Enjoy God's Presence
- 2) Priesthood to Atone for God's People
- 3) Peril from Ignoring God’s Purity
- 4) Permanent Solution: Christ our Better Priest

I. Plan to Enjoy God’s Presence

A. Burning Bush to Sinai

1. I want to sketch a quick background to our passage that reviews a story that is familiar to many of us. Exodus begins with God’s people in bondage in Egypt & God appearing to Moses in Fire and Glory in the Burning Bush.
2. God tells Moses he will “redeem [Israel] with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment” and “will take you to be my people, and I will be your God” (Ex. 6:6b-7a)
3. After redeeming Israel by means of the 10 plagues, and bringing them across the Red Sea on dry land, God’s presence

is with them in a burning pillar that is a glorious cloud by day and fire by night. (Also known as the Shekinah Glory.)

4. They come to Mt. Sinai and God appears to them from fire on the mountain top in great glory and gives them the 10 Commandments.
5. Exodus 24:17 says *“the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.”*
6. But the people were afraid, and they told Moses *“Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us... Go near and hear all that the Lord our God will say...”* (Deut. 5:25b, 27a). The people ask Moses to be their go-between or mediator.

B. Purpose for Tabernacle

1. This is the backdrop for the Tabernacle. God wants to dwell with His people, but they are terrified of His glory.
2. So, God tells Moses *“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”* (Ex 25:8)
3. And after giving the instructions on the Tabernacle and the altar, laver, lampstand and table of shewbread – and after giving instruction for the priestly garments, God says this in Exodus 29:42-45
“There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.”

C. God’s Presence Indwells the Tabernacle

1. The rest of Exodus details the building of the Tabernacle and Moses’ consecration of the Tabernacle.
2. At the end of the book of Exodus we find these words: *“So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”* (40:33b-35)
3. God is present with His people now, but there is no communion with Him. Something is still missing. That is where Leviticus 9 comes in.

TRANSITION: God had a plan in redeeming Israel: God wanted to dwell with them and let them enjoy his Presence. To accomplish this a Tabernacle was needed, and so was a Priesthood.

II. Priesthood to Atonement for God's People

A. Priestly Garments

1. Before we get back to Leviticus chapter 9, I want to quickly describe the garments made in Exodus and put on the Aaron and his sons in Leviticus chapter 8.
2. (Side note: the importance of the role of the priests comes through in how Exodus devotes about 80 verses to a description of these garments and the priestly ordination but only 52 verses to the crossing of the Red Sea and the Song of celebration in Exodus 15)
3. The garments were made of similar materials as the Tabernacle and were intended *“for glory & for beauty”* (Ex. 28:2)

4. Ephod: like an apron with shoulder pieces that would cover quite a bit of the shoulder with onyx or carnelian stones on which the tribes of Israel are engraved. [*"Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance."* 28:12]
5. A breast piece with 12 precious stones tied firmly to the ephod, and it has a pouch with the Urim and Thummim (items used to find God's will sort of like Lots, we think); the stones each had one of the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on it. [*"Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly"* 28:30]
6. Robe of the Ephod (like a surplice) or outer garment – this was long and at the bottom edge had bells and decorations [*"its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the Lord... so that he does not die"* 28:35]
7. The High Priest had a special headpiece with a frontlet (engraved plate) that said, "Holy to the LORD" [*"so he bear(s) any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts... that they may be accepted before the Lord."* 28:38]
8. Underneath the ephod and robe was a white linen tunic and linen "breeches" [underwear] (both uncommon compared to the Israelites who would have worn wool garments mostly) – 28:39-43 [*"to cover their naked flesh... lest they bear guilt and die"* 28:42-43]
9. There were no shoes, however (perhaps since Moses had to remove his shoes when approaching God at the burning bush).

B. Consecration & Sacrifice brings the Blessing & Holy Fire

1. Lev. 1-7 give the sacrificial laws that priests are provided to perform so that we may approach God. Lev. 8 had the ordination/consecration of the priests. Now Leviticus 9--
2. Read Lev. 9:8-24
3. Like Moses coming down from Sinai, Aaron comes down from the sacrifice and they both can enter the Tabernacle now – they give a blessing to the people.
4. God answers with fire and begins the fire that is to be kept burning (by the priests 6:12-13) and will be kept burning for centuries.
5. Israel can be witness to God's miraculous presence through observing the ever-burning Fire from God's presence as sacrifices are received day and night (meals eaten before God)
6. The response is joy and awe. [first ever public worship service.]
7. This ceremony (and the 7 days of sacrifices) is reenacted when Solomon dedicates the Temple - 2 Chron. 7:1 *"As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.'"*

TRANSITION: God's people can now worship Him with a Priesthood installed and animal sacrifices in place so that they may approach this Holy God in fear and wonder. But all does not go to plan. God's wrath still burns against impurity.

III. Peril from Ignoring God's Purity

A. Consuming Fire

1. Leviticus 10:1-3
2. God is glorified in judgment or through worship.
3. The next several chapters detail the purity laws (clean/unclean foods and states of purity, leprosy, etc.)

B. Day of Atonement (center of Pentateuch)

1. Ties in to Lev. 10 in the first two verses.
2. High Priest can only enter the Holy of Holies (God's presence), one time a year after an elaborate community-wide fast and ritual to seek atonement for the people.

C. God's Fiery Presence Renewed later in time of apostasy (1 Kings 18)

D. God's Fiery Presence Leaves ultimately in the Exile (Ezek. 1, 11)

E. God's Fiery Presence Prophesied to be Restored with God in their midst forever (Ezek. 43:1-9)

TRANSITION: Israel's experience of God's presence was imperfect and incomplete. Their priests were marred by sin and had to offer sacrifices on their own behalf. The people, as a whole, abandoned God and were sent into exile. And the prophesied return of God's special presence never materialized as the rebuilt Temple was not lit

by God's fire and instead the old men wept when they saw it. How can God's people worship God without His Fiery Presence?

IV. Permanent Solution: Christ our Better Priest

A. Read Hebrews 9:11-14; 9:23-26; 10:19-23

B. Christ has brought us something Better

1. Better Tent (9:11)
2. Better Sacrifice (9:23)
3. Better Redemption (9:26, 10:14)
4. Better Priest (7:26-7:28, 10:21)
5. Better Access (4:14-16, 10:20)

C. Renewed Fire

1. Christ baptized his Church with Fire at Pentecost (Acts 2)
2. His Church is being built up as a Holy Temple for the Lord (1 Pet. 2; 1 Cor. 3)
3. Ultimately the Fiery nature of Christ's Presence will light the New Jerusalem and we will dwell with God (and without any temple at all)

CONCLUSION

We are so privileged having the fulfillment of what the OT shadows and types represented. We can approach God any time we want through our Great High Priest (and our Sacrifice). And one day we will join redeemed Israel around God's Throne for all time.

I hope you are encouraged by this glimpse of the grandeur of God. His Fiery Presence will bring judgment and should purge us of lingering sin as we don't want to face the experience of being saved yet so as

by fire (1 Cor. 3) with our works burned up. His fire can also warm us and fill us and enthrall us. I hope you will look at Exodus and Leviticus with newfound wonder and awareness of what God is doing. He is drawing his people to Himself – and ultimately, He came down Himself to take on the judgment for us, and to bring God's presence to us (as Jesus tabernacle with us – John 1:14).

PRAY -----

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