

Highway to Heaven

Leviticus

(preached Pine Grove 1/18/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Phones these days have world maps and driving directions programmed into them.

So, I was wondering if it would give me directions to places that it would be possible for me to drive.

I could get driving directions for some cities in Mexico, but not South America, though it is possible for me to drive there.

I could also get driving directions for places in Canada.

But the farthest point that I could get direction for was Anchorage Alaska.

According to the maps on my phone, I could drive to Anchorage Alaska in 70 hours and 3 minutes with no traffic.

If you allow for traffic, it would take 72 hours and 43 minutes, which is a little over 3 days of nothing but driving.

Throw in 3 kids, a couple irritated parents, restroom stops, hotel stops, gas and food stops and it would most likely take well over a week...

Even if you managed to drive 8 hours, which is a lot with a family.

The trip would cover 4,374 miles and 5 time zones.

And would includes 81 turns, merges, or changes of directions.

And would include 30 different highways and roads.

So, who wants to pack the kids in the car and take off tonight of winter?

Probably none of now, and probably none of us in summer either.

But it is interesting that there is a route to get there if you ever decide to go and it is available on your phone.

And though paper maps are on their way out, there are an incredible collection of information.

Before the days of electronic maps, you could plot your way on maps before taking a long trip.

The incredible part is that someone had gone ahead of you and made note of all the roads, cities, and states that make up a map.

They had collected all that information and put it together on a single piece of paper that helped you get from point A to point B.

Map making has always been fascinating to me.

How do they know the exact location of things and he curves in the road, and the streams and the rivers?

I could go on and on, but tonight is not a lesson in map making.

But as we come to the book of Leviticus in our tour through the Bible, it can be described as a map of sorts.

If we look back over what we have learned, I would a couple major events...

One, God created the world and he created man to rule the world.

And when both were put in place, man ruled for God and God fellowshiped with man.

Genesis says that God walked with Adam and Eve.

But the second event was the fall, where man sinned and was kicked out of the garden, but more importantly, man was sent out of God's presence.

And if you go from that point in time where God removed himself from man's presence, the Bible is the story of man trying to find his way back to God.

And it is the story of how gives a map of sorts that will lead man back to fellowship with Him.

And the truth of that map back to God is that all roads will lead to Jesus.

He is going to be the only way back to God.

For a number of reasons.

We will talk about some of those tonight.

But what is important to remember is that God's plan did not include sending a Savior right away.

No, God is going to bring a deliverer.

He going to bring Someone that will connect men back to Him....

Yet, he does not do it instantly.

So, he goes to Abraham and he calls him to follow him.

God is going to make Abraham a great nation for the simple purpose of bringing forth a Savior.

If we are thinking in terms of a map of God's plan, his call to Abraham was the on ramp to the highway.

And then the next stop is making a nation from Abraham's descendants.

We saw that last week in the book of Exodus.

And the nation Israel would be another landmark on God's map that is providing a way back to him.

So, he gives that nation some laws to follow in the 10 Commandments, which will serve to keep them on the road.

Unfortunately, Israel can't follow the laws, and they veer off course often.

However, God does not abandon them.

Though they pay when they disobey, He stays right with them guiding them along the route that He has set.

And when Exodus ended last week, God even decides to dwell among his people again in the tabernacle that they have built.

But there is one key difference this time when he dwells among men..

He won't walk freely among them like He did with Adam and Eve in the garden.

He will dwell in the innermost part of the tabernacle away from sinful men.

God can no longer fellowship with Israel because they are a sinful people.

Though he has chosen them to bring forth a Savior, their sin still separates them from God.

And though Israel is part of God's map that leads men back to Himself....

They also are not fit to fellowship freely with Him.

And so, when Exodus ends, we have a sinful nation and a Holy God.

God's plan is coming together but there are still some rules of the road that Israel needs to obey if God is continue with them.

And this is really the purpose of the book of Leviticus.

Up until this point in time, Israel does not fully grasp everything there is to know about God.

They know he is powerful as they watched him part the Red Sea.

They know he is a provider because he gave them food in the wilderness.

But they are just beginning to understand God's holiness.

In fact, the first time that God describes himself as holy is in the book of Leviticus.

Though the word holy was used when Moses met God in a burning bush...

And though the word holy was used as part of the 10 Commandments, God does not describe Himself as holy until Leviticus chapter 11.

But that is an important concept that Israel needs to understand about God.

Since they had grown up in the land where the Egyptians worshipped many gods, they had no idea what their God was like.

The book of Leviticus is in many ways a roadmap within a road map.

In the big picture, we are following God's map that is leading man back to a right relationship with him.

But within the book of Leviticus, we will see a map of how sinful man can fellowship with a Holy God until Jesus comes.

This is the incredible compassion of God.

He has an ultimate plan to reunite Himself with man and to make man fit for His kingdom...

But in the meantime, he creates a way for man to fellowship with him.

I don't know really know how to illustrate this, but in some ways...

It is like Grandma in the kitchen cooking Thanksgiving Dinner.

You are a little boy really out of place in that kitchen.

You just get in the way, but the hope of a good meal just draws you in to the kitchen.

So, you look up at Grandma, and she knows you just want to eat...

But it isn't quite ready, so she tears out a little bit of the turkey and slips it to you.

Though dinner may be hours away, she still loves and wants you to know that...

So she makes a way for you to take part in the dinner before it is actually done.

Well, that's really a poor way to illustrate this, but in some ways...

God makes a way for fellowship with His people until his plan is finished.

And the book of Leviticus is that..

It is the instruction manual how sinful Israel can fellowship with a Holy God...

While he works out his plan to bring forth an ultimate solution to man's broken fellowship with Him.

And there are going to be two parts of enjoying fellowship with God.

The First Way to Enjoy Fellowship with God is through Sacrifice, which will see in chapters 1-16.

The Second Way to Enjoy Fellowship with God is through Obedience, which we will look at in chapters 17-27.

Here's the outline of the book...

- I. Fellowship with God Through Sacrifice (1-16)
 - A. Offerings for People and Priests (1-7)
 - B. Ordination of Priests (8-9)
 - C. Execution of Disobedient Priests (10)
 - D. Purification from Uncleaness (11-15)
 - E. Annual Atonement (16)

II. Fellowship with God through Obedience (17-27)

- A. Dietary Regulations (17)
- B. Sexual Regulations (18)
- C. Community Regulations (19-20)
- D. Worship Regulations (21-25)
- E. Blessing for Obedience (26)

So let's dive in with the first section of Leviticus, which is instruction on how to.....

I. Fellowship with God Through Sacrifice (1-16)

Before we look at Leviticus, here a couple bits of info to tie together Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus..

First, they were all written by Moses, who was inspired by God to write them.

Now, when it comes to time, Genesis covers a wide period of time.

Beginning with creation, which I personally feel was around 5000 BC and going all the way until 1700 BC, a period of 3000 + years.

Then the book of Exodus covers about 430 years.

Leviticus will only cover one year.

One year has passed since the Israelites fled Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai.

They have received the 10 Commandments and built the tabernacle.

And now in the beginning of the second year, the book of Leviticus begins.

And it begins with 7 chapters that describe the different sacrifices that Israel was to offer to God.

A. Offerings for People and Priests (1-7)

Here is what you need to understand about these sacrifices...

Sacrifices began long before this instruction was given to Israel.

If you remember way back in the garden of Eden, what was the first thing that Adam and Eve did after they sinned against God.

They went and hid because they were ashamed of their nakedness.

God pronounced a curse upon them, but they he makes clothes for them out of what?

Animal skins.

And what does that mean? An animal had to be killed to provide a what?

A covering for their sin.

And with that, we see the first idea of sacrifice in the Bible.

And what is this pointing to way back in Genesis 3?

That something must die to pay for sin.

Now, on that occasion, it was a small animal, but what is the greater truth that event was pointing to?

IT was pointing to the death of Jesus.

The Bible clearly says that there is no forgiveness of sins with the shedding of blood.

And this idea was established long ago in the opening pages of Genesis as soon as sin had entered the world.

Now, we have no indication that God told Adam and Eve to continue offering sacrifices in their life.

But we do see that their children offered sacrifices to God.

Cain and Abel were bringing a sacrifice to God when Cain got upset with Abel and killed him.

And why was he mad?

Because God had rejected his offering.

Now, we have no way of knowing why God rejected his offering, but some have suggested because it was not a blood sacrifice.

Either way, we see that the first generation of people knew to offer sacrifices to God.

How did they know to do that?

We don't know. The Bible simply doesn't say.

We just know that they did, and we again see this idea in the first 7 chapters of Leviticus.

Where God will now give a detailed description of what the people should offer as a sacrifice for their sin.

And here is why this is placed in the first part of Leviticus.

When Exodus ended, God has entered the tabernacle to live among his people.

But His holiness will not allow Him to be among sinful people unless they are continually offering sacrifices to cover their sin.

Remember in the garden when God walked with Adam and Eve....?

There was no need for sacrifices to be offered because there was no sin separating them.

But now sin complicates the relationship between God and his people.

So, God establishes a clear sacrificial system in order to make it possible for Him to dwell among His people.

Now, all of these sacrifices were not blood sacrifices, but God is teaching Israel an important principle.

Payment for sin comes through the death and blood.

And he is also teaching this very important concept...

Substitutionary atonement for sin.

And that simply means this...

God is teaching that the people can experience forgiveness by having something else pay the price for their sin.

Which is what?

A picture of Jesus dying in our place on a cross we deserved.

As we move out of this section of sacrifices, we come to chapters 8 & 9.....

Where God gives instructions to the priests...

B. Ordination of Priests (8-9)

Though we didn't talk about it much in our overview of Exodus...

God established a priesthood in Exodus along with the tabernacle...

These men would be responsible to act as a bridge between God in the tabernacle and the people in the land.

They would carry out the sacrifices by offering them to God.

They were to be set apart from the people by their lifestyle and dress...

And God ordained them to serve him in this way.

Now, what is the picture that God is painting here.

The idea of a mediator.

You see this in elementary school when a boy likes a girl.

Well, it just isn't permissible for him to go directly to her.

So, he goes to her best friend, tells her to tell the girl that he would like to sit with her at lunch.

So, she goes and tells and the girl, who gives a message back to him.

And then it goes back and forth through this middle person for days, weeks and months.

Well, Israel's priest will serve that function in the life of the nation.

They will administer some of the sacrifices to please God and satisfy his wrath toward the sins of the people.

And this whole system of priests is all designed to point to Jesus, whom the Bible calls the Mediator between God and man.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father and became what?

Our great high priest.

He now sits at God's right hand and intercedes for His people.

That is also why I am not called a priest, but a pastor.

None of you need a priest today to stand between you and God.

You have access to God through the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Israel needed a priest, and chapters 8 & 9 describe God installing them as priests.

However, chapter 10 is a reminder that God takes His holiness very seriously.

Because in chapter 10, we see the....

C. Execution of Disobedient Priests (10)

Two priests, Nadab and Abihu, simply offered a sacrifice to God in the wrong way.

We don't know the exact error they made, we just know that broke God's command of how to offer a sacrifice to Him.

An in an instant, they were dead.

And that example happened right before Israel's eyes to serve as a reminder that God takes worship of Him very seriously.

We gaze upon that chapter, and we should be reminded that how we worship God is a serious matter.

It is not to be taken lightly.

In a day where people have seem to forgotten the holiness of God...

In a day where people do all sorts of crazy things and call it worshipping God..

In a day where anything goes as long as you stick Jesus name in there somewhere...

Let us be a church that worships God rightly.

Let us worship him according to the truth of His Word.

Let us worship him in a way where we have a high view of Him and a low view of us.

Man is not be exalted in our worship.

God is to be exalted in all we do.

May we be careful to never mix that up.

Nadab and Abihu sought their own way to worship God, and it cost them their lives.

And then this first section talks about....

D. Purification from Uncleaness (11-15)

In chapters 11-15, God outlines ways some rules of purification.

Everything from unclean food to unclean people to unclean animals is addressed.

And though people look upon these rules and fail to see their purpose for Israel.

You need to remember that Israel did not enjoy the modern comforts that we take for granted.

Especially when it comes to medicine.

If a disease entered into the people, it could wipe out the entire nation in a matter of weeks or months.

As people have looked back upon these rules of purification, many are seen as common rules to promote hygiene and prevent infection.

Many of these purification rituals simply offered protection from disease and sickness in a time when people lived in close knit communities.

And then this first section of Leviticus closes with very key chapter, in which we see the idea of....

E. Annual Atonement (16)

At the end of chapter 16 beginning in verse 29...

God sets aside a day of atonement that Israel would observe every year.

On this day, no one would work and the priest would go into the tabernacle and offer a sacrifice for all the sins of the nation for the year.

We read about all those sacrifices in the beginning of the book, but the simple truth is that as numerous as those sacrifices were...

They could not and did not cover every possible sin.

So to make atonement for every sin committed, God established a day every year where all of Israel's sins were covered

Now, you need to understand that this did not take away the sins of the people.

They were only covered for a year, and then the priest went in the next year.

It is like having a disease that was incurable.

You would go in each week and treat the symptoms which would allow you to function..

But what you really needed was a cure.

This is the picture of Israel, who would have to send in a priest once a year to cover their sins.

And then again the next year...

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says about *that...*

¹¹ Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹² but He, having offered one sacrifice for ¹⁰sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that

time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.

The point is this.

All those priests had to go in year after year and offer a sacrifice that didn't take away the sins of the people.

But then the great high priest, Jesus Christ, offered his life as a once-for-all payment for sin.

And instead of going into God every year with His sacrifice...

He went in and sat down.

That is why Jesus' sacrifice doesn't just cover sins, it removes them once for all.

Eventually the sins of the people would need to be paid for in full, but God provided a temporary covering for them right here in Leviticus 16...

And then we come to the last section of Leviticus...

The first 16 chapters dealt with how to enjoy fellowship with God through sacrifice...

But there was always the way to avoid sacrifice and that was through obedience to God...

What did all the sacrifices point out to the people?

They pointed out their incredible disobedience.

God used the last few chapters of Leviticus to lay out some regulations for daily living....

The point is this...

Obey and you can avoid sacrifices...

Simply put, the second section of Leviticus can be called....

II. Fellowship with God through Obedience (17-27)

Now, we all understand that no one can obey perfectly.

But God has always preferred obedience over sacrifice.

People who live by the rule....

Well, I can just sin and because I am already forgiven.

There's plenty of grace out there.

First of all, I would say that the Bible never teaches that.

Both the OT and the NT forbid that kind of attitude.

We don't sin more so that we can get more grace.

God didn't put all these sacrifices in place so that Israel could live in rebellion but then be granted temporary forgiveness.

No, the sacrifices were a mercy to prevent God from destroying them in their sin.

They were not a safety net so that they could lead reckless lives.

A tightrope walker doesn't put a net below so that he can go out and do cartwheels and try to fall knowing that he won't die.

No the point of stepping on the tightrope is making it to the other side.

And the point of giving people law is that they follow them.

Not that the people break them so they can get more forgiveness.

The second thing I would say to the person who thinks that they can sin all the more because they are forgiven is this...

Examine yourself to make sure you are saved.

The promise of the new covenant is the promise of a new heart.

When someone is truly saved, they are given a heart that desires to obey God.

That is the teaching of the Bible.

And if a person is consistently disobedient to God, that is probably evidence that they never got a new heart.

And if the heart is changed, salvation was never experienced.

You will not find one example in all the Bible of a person who was saved but lived a life of sin after salvation.

And Israel was given the final section of Leviticus to show them that they could also enjoy fellowship by obeying God.

It was not given to say to Israel..

“Here are some laws. Its okay to break them and then go and offer a sacrifice and get your sins covered.”

No, God is saying.

Here are my laws. Obey them and live.

I want you to be a people known for obedience not a people know for sacrifice.

That’s always the shortest road to fellowshiping with God....OBEY GOD.

And the first three points of this last chapter were laws given to Israel to govern their daily living.

A. Dietary Regulations (17)

B. Sexual Regulations (18)

C. Community Regulations (19-20)

Along the lines of what we have already spoken about, Israel needed to survive as a people.

And God gave his laws that reflected His character to promote the protection and provision for His nation.

This is what is important to remember...

God can regulate anything he wants.

He is creator of both the world and the people who inhabit it.

His laws surpass our understanding and wisdom.

And it is not up to the creature to question the wisdom of the Creator.

So God offered some rules for diet, sexual relationships, and community living in chapters 17-20.

D. Worship Regulations (21-25)

Then in chapters 21-25, he gives more laws for the priests, and then institutes and festivals for how Israel is to worship Him

E. Blessing for Obedience/Curses for Disobedience (26)

The last section which is chapters 26-27....

Which are important as we move through the Old Testament.

The point of chapter 26 is really the promise of the Old Covenant.

If Israel obeys God, he will bless them and keep them.

If they disobey, he will curse them and judge them.

If they repent, he will remove the judgment.

And in a nutshell, that is a summary of Israel's relationship with God throughout the rest of the OT.

They will obey and times and be blessed.

They will mostly disobey God and experience his judgment.

And we will see that time and time again as we move through the OT book by book.

Conclusion

When I look back on the book of Leviticus as a Christian.

I am overcome with one emotion...RELIEF.

I am relieved that Jesus perfectly fulfilled the laws that we see in Leviticus.

I am relieved that I don't have to go see a priest to enjoy fellowship with God.

I am relieved that I don't have to go and offer animal and grain sacrifices for my family every week.

And you know why I am relieved?

All of those things are found in the person of Jesus Christ.

He is the one who fulfilled the requirements of the law for us.

He is the one who now stands as our great high priest.

And he is the one who has offered his body and blood as payment for our sins.

Once for all.

That is the wonder of Jesus.

All of those things are found in Him and Him alone.

Amen.