

Christ in the Sacrifices 16-01-24a

This is Sunday, the 24th of January, 2016. We continue our study of Christ and the sacrifices, and we're moving away from Leviticus. I think we have done a fair, although not thorough, job of reviewing the elements of sacrifice in the first six chapters, both the requirements of offerors and the requirements of the priests who supervise those offerings.

And armed with this knowledge, we are going to move forward in time. You remember that Leviticus is content that was delivered to Moses at Mount Sinai, specifics in great detail in worship of God at the tabernacle and eventually the temple. So Judges is later, right? This is after the 40 years of wandering, after crossing the Jordan, after going into Israel proper, what will become the nation of Israel, and the great victories under Joshua, the distribution and settlement of the land.

And then you have that sort of indistinct time. There is no king in Israel. The great miraculous signs from God seem to be largely in the past, and people are sort of milling around, and they are not being watched.

There is not a Moses. There is not a Joshua. There is not a king on the throne.

So much more in my absence, God might say, are you going to be obedient? Well, having studied the book of Judges, some of you remember our trip through this great book, it is somewhat sporadic, to put it kindly. There are cycles. Remember, if there was one Hebrew word that sums up the book of Judges, it is galgal.

Gil at the top, gal at the bottom. Gil at the top, gal at the bottom. They are apathetic and indifferent and disobedient, get tangled up with the Amorite culture.

They are down. Then God oppresses them, allows the enemies to come and get them. They cry out to God.

God sends a judge, sends a deliverer, and they are up. They are responsive. They are celebratory.

They are all big fans of God again. They are up at the gil, at the top of the circle. Then time passes, no more miracles.

Everybody does what is right in his own eyes, down at the bottom again. It is 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock. It is up, it is down.

It is over and over. That is the book of Judges. Well, we are going to be in Judges chapter 6 this morning.

We will take a moment here to pause and go before the Lord and ask His blessing on our study. We are going to look at one of these episodes. One will suffice, but it pertains because it involves sacrifice.

It involves the altar. It involves worship in the presence of God. Yet, it is very much outside the guidance that we have just studied in such great detail in Leviticus.

Let us take a moment to go before the Lord in prayer. We will pick up this story in Judges chapter 6.

Father, how grateful we are for your sustaining grace, your presence within us in the person of your Spirit and the indwelling of both yourself and the Lord Jesus Christ as we are faithful and abide in your Word and have your Word abide in us. We thank you for that security.

We thank you for that mark upon us, that stamp of ownership that secures us and guarantees our eternal life and our future before you in your presence, in your kingdom to serve and to continue to strive to fulfill your purpose for us. We thank you for the provision you've made for us with the presence of your Spirit that gives us strength that is not natural to us, is not something we are born with, and for the guidance and the truth and the power of your Word which he uses to bring to our mind the promises and principles and doctrines that are so essential to our righteousness, to our life in productive service before you.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word this morning, your Spirit will minister it to each heart, that we will see its pertinence, its application, its relevance to what we are currently committed to and engaged in, that we can shine as lights in the midst of an increasingly dark and perverse generation, and that those who are

seeking relationship with you and are interested in a future with you will find us a useful and helpful source of that truth that pertains to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.

Judges chapter 6, it says, "Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." Then comes after chapter 5, which is the Song of Deborah. So you remember the whole scene there, going all the way back in chapter 4 after Ehud, the left-handed guy that kills the fat king with his sword. You remember that whole thing.

Ehud was dead. Children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. This is chapter 4. The Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Commander of his army was Sisera.

And you remember Jael and the tent peg. Sisera's untimely demise, his last meal being a glass of milk. And you remember the whole tent peg in the head, Jael.

Then you have Deborah and Barak. Barak needs a little bit of motherly care, apparently, and so Deborah is brought up. And the main reason I'm reviewing this by way of context is, what is God's model and God's standard for leadership in and among His people? Men or women? Men.

It is the elders of Israel. It is Adam who was formed first, then Eve. There is the patriarchal model.

God could just as easily have made it a matriarchal model. We could all have been Cherokees. The women could have run the whole deal.

Could have equally been. There's no qualitative difference. God almost arbitrarily, if you will, said the men are going to be responsible and accountable, and the wives, the mothers, will fulfill a complementary role under that authority.

It's just a fact. It seems so much a cause of vibration and diffugality now to even mention it, but that's God's model. So if you don't like it, take it up with God.

But there is such a dearth of proper leadership in Israel in this generation. God says, "Well, I will show you how bad things are. I will raise up a woman." And Deborah is a godly woman, fully capable, and she is used to be a leader in Israel.

So there's a sense in which, this isn't quite accurate, but you can say God breaks His own rule. God breaks His own pattern, certainly. He has designated the men to be leaders, but when the men fail, God says, "Look, I'll use a faithful person regardless of their gender because their faith is more important than the pattern."

Faith is more important than the expectation and even the commonly given guidance. So does that make sense? Deborah is sort of an anomaly, and in a way it is a rebuke to Israel.

People always say, "Woman judge, what's going on here?" And yes, that's the purpose. God is shaking them up and saying, "Don't you see that faith and obedience are more important than a legalistic adherence to the law, to the rules?" We're not running around trying to find rules to break, but God is emphasizing something.

Faith is important. Well, this is helpful background. You get the Song of Deborah in chapter 5, wonderful poem there.

Then in chapter 6, this is where we are now. With this as immediate background in the book of Judges, we just saw a violation of the pattern. Are you with me so far?

Okay, chapter 6: "The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord," just as they did back in chapter 4. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years. Last time it was the king of Canaan, Jabin, Sisera, that whole crowd. This time it is the Midianites.

What do we know about Midian? When's the last time we had big familiarity with Midian? Jethro. Moses' wife is a Midianite, right? He spent 40 years over there chasing sheep, and that's where he encountered God at Mount Sinai.

What happened when Moses first encountered God there in the wilderness of Midian? What did he see? He had been doing that for 40 years, and then what happened? "I will turn aside and see this great sight." What was the sight? The burning bush.

You can speak up. This is going to be a tough Sunday, so feel free to speak out and speak up. I'm going to need help with this.

So crowd participation is welcome. So what did Moses see? The burning bush.

So the hand of Midian is prevailing against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made themselves dens and caves and strongholds in the mountains. They have been driven to caves and holes in the ground.

Caves and holes in the ground. Does that ring any kind of a bell? "The birds have nests and the foxes have dens, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head." Hebrews 11, the people of faith were chased out, and where did they live? Caves and holes in the ground.

This is one of those times. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, the Midianites would come up, also Amalekites, or Amalekites, and the people of the east would come up against them. This is just all of the riffraff.

Don't even know who they are, they're just from the east. They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.

Now this is a very, almost suspiciously detailed account of the problem. When you read through the book of Judges and you go through these cycles and these times of oppression and disobedience, followed by crying out to God, repentance, deliverance, and a short time of faithfulness, and then it repeats, this is one of the most detailed accounts of the oppression, the discipline.

So you have Midianites, you have Amalekites, you have people of the east encamping against them, destroying the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, leaving no sustenance, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. There was another guy that lost his oxen and his sheep and his donkeys. Remember that?

What I'm trying to point out here is, as you read through this initial introduction to the story of Gideon, we tend to think of the lamps and the pitchers and the 300 men, but this introduction highlights and tugs on strings that extend elsewhere in Scripture, especially in our retrospective view. Even in the days when people first encountered this book of Judges, they already knew the story of Job.

They already knew that they had been oppressed in Egypt and were well aware of what their grandparents and parents had told them in terms of the tradition of God's intervention on their behalf, as we will soon see. So these enemies would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts. Both they and their camels were without number, and they would enter the land to destroy it.

It's sort of like the later armies of the Greeks, Alexander and the Romans under the Caesars, who would come in and live off the land, just consume everything as they went through and leave nothing in its path. The Union army did this in the South during our Civil War.

So Israel, verse 6, was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. What is the difficulty here? There is no national identity, there is no standing army, and when these invaders come in, these interlopers, these squatters, if you will, they come in and just occupy the land and take what they want, and the little local militias are not powerful enough to drive them out.

They don't have a national army. And this is one of the problems that individual states would have had in this nation if we had not confederated into the United States and pooled our resources to have a national army, the first one under General Washington.

But the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts, and the individual parts, these little communities, could not fend off these incursions. So they are greatly impoverished, and it came to pass when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel.

He didn't send a blight upon the enemies. He didn't send a great hailstorm to destroy them all. He didn't drown them in the sea. He didn't burn them up with fire.

When people cried out to the Lord and said, "We are oppressed by these Midianites," God sent a message in the mouth of a messenger. What does he say? "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, drove them out before you, and gave you their land."

Do you remember that there was a day when I was with you, and you were the one who drove others out and occupied their land? "Also I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell,' but you have not obeyed my voice."

And fear here is worship. Why are they being overrun? Why are they being impoverished? Why are they being oppressed? They have disobeyed.

Remember our memory verse: "Just as you have obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." God was with them and brought them in with a mighty hand. And then it is as though God withdrew a little bit to see if they would remain faithful, and they did not.

They are fearing, they are worshiping the gods of the Amorites. And God says you shouldn't be surprised if you depart from me, that I will depart from you in terms of provision, and protection, and blessing, and continued power to occupy and enjoy the fruit of the land. You have not obeyed my voice.

That is the reason. Now, verse 11: "The angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree, which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites."

And if you remember our study in Judges, this is a pretty vivid picture. A winepress and an olive press, actually you can do the same thing in one, but there's one in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's a cave-type of thing.

You're indoors so that you can capture the juice of the grape or the oil from the olive in troughs and in channels and store it in vessels. You have a giant beam that affixes into a wall and there's a great weight and you crush these things and the desired grape juice or olive oil comes out.

So he's indoors and he's threshing indoors because outdoors, when you thresh, it's kind of like a car going down a dirt road. There's this giant cloud that is visible for a great distance, and if the Midianites see this, they realize that there's grain to be had and they're going to come steal it all.

So he's trying to contain it by doing it indoors. There's a little bit of ventilation, of course, but he's trying to suppress the dust cloud from threshing. So he's threshing indoors, and you can only imagine what this is like if you've ever generated a bunch of sawdust or a bunch of dust of any kind in an enclosed space, and especially if you've ever been putting hay up into a hayloft inside a barn and you're bucking those bales up, you know, the square bales.

There's just hay everywhere. There's straw. It's in your eyes, in your sinuses.

It's all down your neck. You're sweaty and it's a miserable, miserable experience, but it has to be done. Well, the angel of the Lord appears to him as he's standing there in this dust cloud with all of the straw sticking to him and down the back of his neck, and he's all sweaty and put out that he's having to do it indoors, and you can imagine the sight.

Just picture him standing there. So the angel of the Lord appears to him and says, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor." He looks about as much like a mighty man of valor as a guy in a hayloft with all of the hay stuck to the sweat, and he's in there wrestling grain, hiding, trying to furtively do a thing that needs to be done outdoors, indoors.

So it's an almost comical pronouncement from the angel. So Gideon says to him, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" So he does immediately identify who this messenger is. He takes the message, the greeting, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor."

Well, he immediately discounts the mighty man of valor part and he chooses to concentrate on the “Lord is with you.” And Gideon says, “Oh my Lord,” this is just Sir or Mister. This is not Lord capital L. He says, “Oh sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Where are all his miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?’ Now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

So what has Gideon been thinking about while he's trying to thresh this grain indoors in these miserable conditions? He's been saying, “I shouldn't have to be doing this. Where is the Lord?” He's reviewing in his mind what he knows of God's actions in previous history.

He's running his Bible knowledge through his mind and he is finding a conflict here between what God has done in the past and what God is doing in the present. God has already sent a prophet, which Gideon has heard say, “It's your entanglement with the culture and the worship of the Amorite gods that has brought this about.”

But he's still asking the question, “Where are his miracles? Where is the Lord? He has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” Well, Gideon is puffing himself up, saying, “You know, where is the Lord when we need him? Here we were being oppressed by the Midianites. I've got the answer. The Lord ought to come and deliver us and we'd be out from under this oppression.”

So the Lord, this messenger, says, “Well, go in this strength of yours. You're so smart. You've got it figured out. You're the man with the plan. Go deliver them, and the Lord will be with you.”

You say, “The Lord used to be with us, and when we would go forth in faith, he would deliver us out of the bondage and into victory. So where is he now?” Implying, if he was here now, I would go forth, and he says, “Okay, go forth in that strength.” God says he will be with you.

So it sort of puts Gideon on the spot. It's one thing to theorize about this and to, you know, have a mental picture of what ought to be happening. It's something else when somebody says, “Okay, you go do it. Put your money where your mouth is. Put your action where your speculation is.”

So Gideon says, “Whoa, wait a minute.” Verse 15: “Oh my Lord,” and that ought to be a lower capital L, “how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”

You remember in the very recent past we talked about the origin of the two tribes Ephraim and Manasseh. What tribes are those from? Tribe of Joseph. Who is the firstborn son? Manasseh.

But who gets all the blessings of the firstborn when Jacob crosses his hands? Ephraim. So although he was technically and chronologically the firstborn, what role does Manasseh play? He is the younger.

Now think about the 13 tribes in Israel, the 12 tribes and then Joseph being split in half. Who's the 12th tribe? Say Joseph is number 11. Who's the 12th tribe? It's Benjamin, right?

Now, in an order of seniority, just in order of age if nothing else, who do you think is older, Benjamin or any one of Joseph's sons? Benjamin was born before Joseph had sons. Because Joseph wants to see Benjamin when he's in Egypt, and Benjamin, he saw him before he ever got.

So in dividing the tribes, Joseph's son that has been relegated to second place is behind Ephraim and behind Benjamin. He is truly the least in Israel. Manasseh is at the tail end of the marching order.

Benjamin's ahead of him. Ephraim's ahead of him, probably in that order. And then here's Manasseh bringing up the rear.

He's what they used to call the sandblowers, the shortest guys in the very back of the formation. Tall guys in the front. I've always wondered about that.

In the military, they want a formation to look somewhat symmetrical, so they put all the tall guys in the front and to the right. And then the stature slopes downward and to the left if you're in the formation. And so the

shortest guys are at the back left, and you got your tall guy there so that when they do eyes right and salute the reviewing general and all that, you got all your best tallest-looking guys on that right-hand side.

And so the guys in the back are sucking up the dust of all the rest of the formation. And it seems to me that for practical reasons, if you wanted to keep a formation tight, you'd put the short guys in the front because they've got the shortest legs. And the guys behind can short step.

But what happens instead is you've got the tall guys in the front and they can't see the guys in the back. And so they're striding out in a normal fashion. And the guys in the back are taking these giant steps and they're already short.

And so now they're short and bobbing up and down, taking these giant steps. And it really does look somewhat comical. Well, this is Manasseh.

The tribe of Manasseh is those guys. They're in the very, very far back. So it's no accident that we have an emphasis here on the tribe of Manasseh as being the one that Gideon is from.

And his father's house in the least shortest sandblower tribe is the least of that. He's in the back end of those guys. That's what he says.

You're calling me a mighty man of valor. You're saying I should go forth and deliver Israel. Look where I'm from.

You don't know this, but I'm from the tribe of Manasseh and I'm the least in my father's house. But the Lord says to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

So Gideon says to him—Gideon begins to suspect now that this is Lord capital L and not lord small l. And when he gets this promise, there is a recognition in his soul. This is the IFF box going off: identification, friend or foe.

And he says, "Wait a minute. This, this sounds like something the Lord God would say." And you could imagine that the sweaty, straw-filled hair on the back of his neck begins to prickle a bit.

He says, "Whoa, I'm—this has—we've just had a prophet here recently. God has sent a recent message. God seems to be interested. Now I'm getting this message from this guy."

He might not have thought that if not for the prophet coming first, but this is what he sees. So he says, "If I found favor in your sight, show me a sign that it is you, capital Y, that is talking with me. I'm beginning to think that you're from the Lord God and you're essentially talking for and are in effect the Lord. If it's really you, show me a sign."

Well, he does. This is not like a, you know, Isaiah, "What sign would you like from the Lord?" "Oh, I don't want to pick a sign." Well, this'll be the sign that Gideon's already got something in mind.

He says, "While you're thinking about this sign thing, stay here. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to you and bring out my offering and set it before you." Offering. That's where we've been heading ever since we started this morning.

That word in verse 18, "I will bring out my offering." A better translation would be "my gift." With that information, what do you think the Hebrew word is here for offering? Which one out of Leviticus 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6? We had in chapter 1 the what? We had in chapter 2 the what?

What did we say? Minchah meant gift. Gift. We have the, uh, shalem, shalemim as the peace offering.

This is the, this is gift. This is minchah. What, by the way, was the word back in Genesis when Cain and Abel were bringing an offering? Minchah. Minchah.

There is a technical use of the word talking about the grain offering with the unleavened flour or the cakes or, uh, you know, fine ground and with the, remember the, the, uh, frankincense and that. Minchah. That's the minchah.

That's what we have here. "Do not depart until I bring out my minchah and set it before you." Before or after Sinai here, do we know what the elements of a proper minchah are? Oh yes, we do.

Moses has already come and gone. The law exists. They had the tabernacle, but in the days of the judges, what happened to the tabernacle? It kind of started falling apart.

You remember over the time of Eli and Samuel, they hardly have anything left. So if he were going to do a proper minchah offering, how should it be done and where should it be done? If it's really you, let's go find the tabernacle and we'll get in front of the priests and the altar and I'll do my minchah.

It's not what he says. I find this a real head-scratcher, that after God—remember, people used to build an altar in the days of the patriarchs and offer something to God. But what did we just review last week?

If a man kills an animal, where's he supposed to bring it? Bring it to the door of the tabernacle. Don't offer sacrifices in the field. Remember that we had the specific prohibition: no more sacrifices in the field, because that's going to lead you down, there won't be anybody to watch, and you're going to end up doing idolatry.

You've got to go bring it in front of a priest. Then it will be accepted. Leviticus 1, Leviticus 2, Leviticus 3, Leviticus 4, 5, 6, all the way through chapter 16, the whole first half of Leviticus is all about this sacrificial system designating, specifying, mandating sacrifice before the door of the tabernacle at that altar with those priests, right?

This is the Lord God talking to Gideon through an angel. The angel is the telephone, right? Gideon says, "Don't leave, I'm going to bring you a minchah, a gift," right?

So we say, well, is this minchah in the general sense, "I'm going to bring you something by way of hospitality and recognition," or is this minchah offering sacrifice in accordance with the law? Well, verse 19, Gideon went and prepared a young goat, unleavened bread from an ephah of flour, the meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and he brought them to him under the terebinth tree and presented them.

He presented them, not at the altar, not in front of a priest, not according to anything in Leviticus chapter 2. He puts the meat in a basket, he makes broth and puts it in a pot, and he brings some unleavened bread that he made from an ephah of flour, right?

This had to have taken some time, because it says he prepared a young goat. He didn't have the goat meat laying in the fridge. He didn't just open up the fridge door and yank out some, you know, take off the Saran Wrap and here's the goat.

He's got to go get a goat, slay the goat, skin the goat, prepare the goat, cook the goat. You don't bring raw goat meat to a guest. And while he's cooking the goat, he also takes some unleavened flour and makes some unleavened bread.

So he is aware of what a minchah requires, right? You would normally serve leavened bread, but he's got enough recollection that a minchah involves unleavened flour, unleavened cakes, and so he does not leaven this bread as he cooks it while he's roasting the goat. He also takes the fat and whatnot and he makes a broth.

You all know how to make a broth or a gravy, something that you can put over the meat. Goat meat might be kind of dry, so you've got some broth to serve with it. And so this is in the form of a meal.

And you remember in Leviticus that God's portion is called food. It is presented symbolically as a meal. You commune with God, he has a portion, and especially in the peace offering you eat a portion, and it is a shared meal.

So this is Gideon's idea. He is going to present this meal if this is in fact the Lord God, but he's still got a question in his mind if it really is or not. So he says, "Stay here and I'll bring this."

So you wonder, well, what does he think the sign is going to be? Maybe he doesn't know what the sign is and he's afraid to ask, and he figures, well, I'll stall for time. Maybe while I'm cooking I'll think of something or this guy will think of something, and when we get back together there will be a sign forthcoming.

So he makes this meal. Well, we're going to stop here and take our break and have our little celebratory fellowship meal, and when we come back we're going to look at the elements of this minchah and what God chooses to do with it.

But here's a point. I always think, I used to have to listen to tapes and there might be a two-parter, but I would only be able to hear the first part and I think, "Well, you're just going to leave me hanging. I heard this whole thing and I've got nothing to go forward with and make application from."

Here's a thought or two from what we have seen thus far in Judges chapter 6. First of all, so many of our problems that challenge us and that we come up against are of our own making, in the sense that we become lackadaisical about obedience. We are not centralized and focused on living the day that lies before us in a way that pleases God and investing our mundane tasks and efforts and circumstances in eternal things.

We view it as just a day. We're little different than those around us who have no relationship with God at all. It should not surprise us that we suddenly find ourselves sacked by the Midianites and vexed by the Amalekites and robbed by the people from the east when we are not diligent to practice what we know.

Not all suffering is for discipline, but a lot of it is. And what is its purpose? It is not punishment. It isn't, "Well, you've made me unhappy, I'm going to hurt you." It is corrective.

That's why the prophet comes. And when the people are crying out, saying, "We're in a bad way here," God says, "Here's why," and it is needless. You don't have to be in this circumstance.

If you were observing your priorities and remembering who you are in relation to the Lord God, this would not be happening. You have forsaken the opportunity to revel in and benefit from the promises. You know the old bumper sticker: "If God seems far away, who moved?" You moved.

So this is a good first step when we face challenges and seem to be vexed and oppressed. The first thing to check is, am I Israel in the book of Judges? Is there something I need to correct, and this is a wake-up call from God? This is a corrective tap on the head with God's rod of chastisement.

Maybe the answer is yes. Maybe the answer is no. But that's the first thing to check, because it's an easy fix.

If God is getting our attention by withdrawing some portion of our blessing or provision, its purpose is to get us back where we need to be. So it is a great thing to check first. If the answer is, I am observing my priorities, I know in my heart of hearts and before the Lord God—and He knows my heart—I am not in a state of straying and inattention to my relationship with Him, He knows it, I know it, that isn't it, okay, now you can move on to the other great reasons for challenge and for suffering, and those all are exponential in terms of the blessing that comes from them.

It's exciting to be in a suffering-for-blessing situation, but suffering as a result of chastisement, you've got to check that box first. Yes or no? Well, we'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up and look at this very interesting minchah that Gideon offers and what God does with it. But let's pause here and take our break.