

The Fellowship Offering

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[0:00] We heard it this morning on the night of our Lord's birth, the angel sang glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

! A lot of people talk about peace this time of the year. People send each other cards with peace on earth and bright gold sparkly letters.

And newscasters and reporters like to contrast the supposed peace of Christmas and the lack of peace in this place or that place.

And under all this talk about peace, I think to a great extent in the world there's a hollow feeling that peace is nothing more than a word.

It's just a vain wish. And so the world talks a lot about peace but doesn't know how to find it. But that is not the lot of God's people.

[1:02] And that is not your lot. It's not the lot of men on whom God's favor rests. They actually enjoy peace. They enjoy peace through the Messiah.

And so the angel's words come true in their lives that there is indeed peace for them. So the world is in a riot. The world is discontent. And yet here we are.

Here we are. God's people. And we actually enjoy peace. His chosen ones. His favored ones. And that's why we're here tonight.

To celebrate peace with God and peace with each other. And that is what communion is all about. And that's what we enjoy tonight. We celebrate peace with God through our Savior.

And we celebrate peace with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. And so tonight I want to focus on how Jesus provides that peace for his people through his sacrifice.

[2:07] And I would invite you to turn in your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 3. Leviticus chapter 3. As we've celebrated the Lord's Supper communion this year, we've been looking at how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament sacrifices.

And tonight we come to the fellowship offering. So Leviticus chapter 3. And let's read the first five verses.

If someone's offering is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the Lord an animal without defect. He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Then Aaron's sons, the priest, shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. From the fellowship offering, he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire.

All the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.

[3:20] Then Aaron's sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood. As an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

Tonight we want to try to understand this could be rather obscure fellowship offering and how Jesus fulfilled it.

And we want to do that by first answering a question. And it's the most important question of all.

And that is, what's its purpose? What is this fellowship offering all about?

Why would an Israelite make a fellowship offering? We get our first big clue by understanding its name.

The word is Shalemim. And there's some debate about how you translate that word. The NIV uses fellowship. Traditionally, it's been called the peace offering.

[4:19] And so this word is related to a very well-known Hebrew word that you probably all are very familiar with. Shalom, which means peace or wholeness.

And so from this name, we learn that this offering was used to celebrate Shalom. It was used to celebrate peace with God. Now, as we think of Shalom and what this, the idea behind this offering is, it's important to remember the covenant context.

That God has a covenant with Israel. And that is the place where the Shalom, this peace is experienced. And so Shalom is a result of living under God's blessing in covenant with God. And so the idea itself is much broader than just our idea of peace that we normally think of. It means wholeness and health and blessing. And so it's the sphere where God is pouring out every kind of blessing on the covenant member, on the believer.

And so every physical blessing, every emotional, every spiritual blessing is enjoyed here. And so Shalom was the experience of Eden. That is what they had there.

[5:40] And that is what they lost. And Shalom is the enjoyment of the new heavens and the new earth. It's enjoying access to God and to his smile.

And it's what the angels promised on that first, on Jesus' first night when he was born. And so, that's sort of the first big clue.

And we also can understand it if we contrast it with the burnt offering. If you remember, the burnt offering was for atonement. And it provided the foundation of the relationship between God and man.

And so it answered the problem, the question of, how can a holy God live with sinful people? How can a holy God have anything to do with sinful people without destroying them?

And so, God and man can live together through an atoning sacrifice. And so that was the burnt offering. And so, in some sense, the burnt offering was about peace, but it was the more narrow idea of appeasement.

[6:52] How can God's wrath be appeased so he doesn't immediately destroy these people? where the peace offering, it provides the context where the people can celebrate with one another and with God the state of blessing, of being God's people.

And so, it was the sphere where men could rejoice in all of God's goodness to them. And so, that is a step beyond atonement. There could be atonement without shalom.

shalom. But when God, in his bringing the Messiah into the world, he not only provides atonement, he's going to provide shalom. And so, this peace offering points to that and it's a step beyond the atonement.

And so, as we'll see in a little bit, as part of the sacrifice, this was mostly about a joyous celebration. It was kind of a religious party where the priests and the worshipers enjoyed this wonderful meal with God in the temple or in the tent of meeting.

And, so that was what this was about. It was a way of showing this enjoyment of God's blessing. And that leads us to our next question. What can we learn about, or what can we learn from how the fellowship offering was made?

[8:15] What can we learn from how the fellowship offering was made? From Leviticus 3, I think we can learn a few things. Just a couple things of how, a couple of things of how God and man could live in a state of blessedness through the sacrifice.

And so, first we learn from the celebration that peace with God could only be celebrated based on the shed blood of a sacrificial substitutionary victim.

And so, the celebration was based on this, the death of a sacrifice. So, verse 2 says that the worshiper had to lay his hand on the victim, on the sacrifice, and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

And this theme is played out and repeated over and over again in Leviticus. No one can approach God without the loss of life.

Either you die or your substitute dies because you are a sinner. sinner. And so, the principle still applies here. Sinful man, whether they're in covenant with God or not, they cannot come to God without the loss of life.

[9:53] And so, this sacrifice was the basis. It allowed access to God. It was the basis of the celebration of peace. And then, second, we learn that the sacrifice itself was the focus of the celebration of peace with God.

So, it was the basis, it was the foundation of how they could come to God, but it was also the focus of what the celebration of peace was all about. And that can kind of seem weird, but if you think about what it was pointing to, our Lord Jesus in communion with Him and with God, it makes sense.

So, the Israelites, if they were happy, if they were enjoying God's blessing, they were not allowed to come into His presence and rejoice and celebrate in any way that they wanted.

The focus of their celebration had to be on the sacrifice. It had to center on the sacrifice. And so, they had to lay their hand on it and they themselves had to slaughter the victim.

And they had to pull the animal apart. And we read about that and take out the fat and the kidneys and they had to give them to the priests. Well, why would they do that?

[11:12] What about the fat and the kidneys? Why were they specifically pulled out of the animal and put on the fire? Well, they represented the very best.

And we cannot enjoy and celebrate peace with God unless we have surrendered to Him the very best in our lives. And that is what it was pointing out. They couldn't give God the leftovers and expect to have ongoing peace with God and expect God to be pleased.

Now, the kidneys, that's kind of weird too from our perspective. But in the Old Testament in the Hebrew mindset, the kidneys were the seat of the emotion. the kidneys So, you know, we write, I heart you, right?

I love you. The Israelites wouldn't write, I heart you. They would write, I kidney you. And that meant the same thing to them.

And if you think that's silly, I mean, ours is really no better, is it? So, the kidneys were the place of the emotion. It was the place of love and of affection.

[12:21] And so, when the worshiper gave the Lord the kidneys, they were saying, in effect, God, you have my heart. Here's my love. Take it. And so, they were saying, Lord, I love you.

I love you more than all the blessings that you've been giving me. I love you more than everything else. You have my heart. Here, take it. Take my best. And so, the worshipers would take out the kidneys and the fat and then the priest would put them on the altar.

And if you notice, they put them right on top of the burnt offering. And that was pointing to the reality that there always had to be an atonement made.

You never got past the need for that atonement. And so, without atonement, God cannot bless men. God cannot bless men with peace and there would be no reason to celebrate.

And so, the sacrifice was burnt up. But then, the fellowship offering took a very different direction. And we don't have time to turn there.

[13:33] And if you want, and I would encourage you to read Leviticus 7 and see what happens after this initial, this sacrifice was made. Remember, the burnt offering, the whole thing, except for the skin, was put onto the fire and the whole thing went up in smoke.

It was all burned up. But the fellowship offering, only the kidneys and the fat were taken and put on the fire. Well, what happened to the rest of the animal? What happened to the rest of the animal? Well, the rest, God gave back to his people. And he gave them back, gave him, gave them the sacrifice back. One, so they could share it with the priests.

And the majority of it, though, it went right back to the worshiper so that he could celebrate with his family. So that he could gather all of his friends and family around and enjoy a banquet.

So they would eat together. And so it was a banquet in the presence of God himself. The Israelite would gather his friends and family. And after the sacrifice had been made, they would stand up and they would declare, this is what God has done.

[14:47] And this is why this offering is being made. And they would praise God. And there were psalms. They were written specifically for this occasion. And so they would praise God and then they would begin to eat.

They would praise God for his goodness and then enjoy a delicious meal before God. Now, last week we read in 1 Samuel 11 about when Saul was reaffirmed as king before all the people.

And it said in that passage, there they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the Lord and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration. And so that's what this fellowship offering is about.

There's this predominance of joy in God's goodness. This is what this sacrifice is about. And so out of thankfulness, out of joy, the people gathered together and they had a feast and they offered these sacrifices to the Lord.

And they celebrated God's goodness to them by eating of the sacrifice. Or we could think of the Passover meal. The Passover meal is a very specific, a very special kind of fellowship offering.

[16:00] You remember the lamb was slaughtered and the blood was put around the doors. But the lamb itself, the families ate together.

And so after the first Passover, that meal became a very special time of great joy and celebration as they remembered how the Lord had saved them out of Egypt.

And so the emphasis was on God's goodness, on how good God had been in rescuing them and in saving them. And so that was what was going on when people made a fellowship offering at the tent of meeting or at the temple.

God's people were gathered and they were feasting and they were doing it under His smile. And so children would be on laps and people would be singing songs and the food would be passed around.

And people were encouraged to eat up, to eat their fill. Depending on why the offering was made, you had either one day or you had two days and the whole thing had to be gone or it was unclean.

[17 : 17] And so there was this encouragement to eat up, to enjoy God's goodness. And so the sacrifice not only allowed them into God's presence with joy, but it became the focus of what they were celebrating.

It became the focus of God's provision of peace and wholeness and happiness and joy with His people. Well, before we move on to our next point, I just want to notice one thing very briefly.

Look at verse 5. What did God think of all this eating and drinking and celebrating and sacrifice?

What did He think of all that?

Well, you see it there in the end of verse 5. It was an aroma pleasing to the Lord. God delights in the well-being of His people.

He delights when they are celebrating His goodness. And so He isn't slow to enter into His people's joy. as they were lifting up their hearts and their voices and enjoying His goodness and as they were feasting on His love, He was feasting on their love.

[18 : 34] It was coming before Him and it was wonderful to Him. It was an aroma pleasing to the Lord. And so this was a beautiful picture of God and His people eating together, having communion with one another, enjoying fellowship.

And they weren't only doing it between God and man. It was with all of the covenant community.

The priests were involved, their friends, their family were all there.

And so that's the fellowship offering's purpose. We saw a few lessons that we can learn about how the fellowship offering was made. And now third, we want to talk about how Jesus fulfilled this sacrifice and how He is our fellowship offering.

He's our peace offering. And so turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5. And there are other passages that talk about this, but I think this does it most clearly.

Romans chapter 5 and verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

[19 : 58] So notice, our justification leads to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And so Jesus is our peace offering. It is through Him, through His sacrifice, that we enjoy peace.

And so His death not only justifies us, but by His death, we, by faith, through faith, we come into a room. We gain access to grace.

And it's this grace in which we now stand. And so, if you're a believer here, I want you to imagine this. You're in a room. And in this room, this is where God blesses His people.

This is where God's grace flows and showers down on His people. And so, this is the place where His love is the air that you are breathing it in.

You are enjoying it all the time and where everything is wholeness and life and health and peace.

And it's through Jesus Christ that we enter into this room.

[21 : 06] So, He is the door into this room. And so, He's not only the door, He has opened the door for you. And so, through Him you go into this room where God is blessing you.

And your life becomes one unending receiving of blessing. Because everything must work together for our good.

And so, every day, something new is coming into our life for our good. It might not look like it's for our good, but it is. And so, it's blessing and blessing. And now, Jesus is the basis of that shalom that we experience in part.

And so, in the Old Covenant, it was this peace offering that was the basis of enjoying this celebration, this peace with God, where they could celebrate His goodness to them.

God's grace. But for us, it's Jesus Christ. And so, what should our response, what should your response be to God's grace? Well, you should rejoice in the Lord.

[22:16] How many times does Paul say that? Rejoice in the Lord. And those aren't empty words. That's because He has been so good to us. And so, every experience of receiving God's grace should drive you to the cross in gratitude.

gratitude. Because, just as that peace offering was the basis of coming into His presence and celebrating peace with God, in the same way, it's God, or it's Jesus Christ and the cross that gives us this access that helps us, that allows us to rejoice.

And so, every blessing that you have, every good thing in your life, it flows from the foot of the cross. And it's in the shadow of the cross that we stand in God's grace.

And so, the cross is not only the basis of our peace, it has to be the focus of our celebration.

Remember, the peace offering was the focus of the Israelite celebration.

So, where do we drink most deeply of God's love? love? It's when we're looking at the cross. And where does our greatest joy come from?

[23:36] Well, it comes from thinking about the cross. He loved me, and he gave himself up for me? That is the wonder of wonders.

Because for a good man, you know what, Jesus might have died. But to die for me, a sinner, that's crazy. That's amazing love. And so, I have to rejoice in God's grace.

Well, how do we do it? Well, in the old covenant, the worshiper offered a peace offering. He offered this sacrifice.

Well, in the new covenant, we now offer a sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:15 says, through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

And so, how do we rejoice? How do we praise? Well, it's through Jesus. Why? Because he's our peace offering. He's the reason that we can come and celebrate God's goodness.

[24:48] And so, the Old Testament worshiper had the peace offering, and we have Jesus. How often should we praise God? How often should we be praising God through Jesus?

Continually, Hebrews says. Continually. Well, why continually? Because continually, we are receiving the blessing of God. We stand in grace.

And so, in a certain way, the shalom of Eden has been recovered in our lives. We are new creations in Jesus Christ. And in a certain way, the shalom of the new heavens and the new earth has come back from the future and has broken into our lives.

And so, we are enjoying the foretaste of that shalom to come. And that's why Jesus said, peace I give to you. My peace I leave you.

And remember his next words, I don't give to you the peace of this world. It's something very different. And so, we don't enjoy shalom completely now.

[25:57] You know, Bremen is not the new heavens and the new earth. But in Christ, we do have peace with God. And you have the first fruits of blessing.

And the full harvest is coming. So, how did you come to stand in this place where every day God's grace is meeting you? Every day shalom is all around your life?

Well, it was because your substitute was slaughtered. Jesus died in your place to bring you peace with God, to bring you every blessing.

And so, from his blood, his blood guarantees God's favor to you. His blood sealed the new covenant in which God said, I will be your God and you will be my people.

And what that means is that everything that is in God will be for you. So, his power will be for you, his patience will be for you, his grace will be for you, his wisdom will be for you.

[27:06] And when that is working in your life, the experience is shalom. And so, we enjoy every spiritual blessing in Christ.

None of you are paupers. None of you are poor. Because you have Jesus Christ. And so, we must rejoice. We must rejoice and praise God.

If the Old Testament believer had reasons to praise God, don't you? Don't we have reasons to praise him? And we must.

We must rejoice. Now, I only have one more question to ask. Do you see the connection between this fellowship offering and what we're doing tonight?

There's a lot of overlaps. There's a lot of similarity. There's a lot of connections there. Where did the Lord's Supper begin? Amen. Well, you remember it was at Passover, that very special fellowship

offering.

[28:10] And so, what we're doing here tonight has its roots in this fellowship offering. It has its roots in all the offerings, all the sacrifices. But this is where you start to really see what this communion is all about, this special fellowship offering.

And so, it's no coincidence that it's called communion. It's called fellowship. And so, we celebrate peace with God tonight.

We celebrate peace with one another tonight. And so, we do it in His presence. We do it with Him smiling upon us and enjoying that.

And we do it with our brothers and sisters. Because the Old Testament believer, the Old Testament worshiper, he had the whole covenant community around him to praise God for His goodness.

And that's what we're doing here tonight. This isn't a birthday party for one, is it? This is a family gathering. And you do it as you focus on Christ's sacrifice.

[29:21] Remember, the focus on the peace offering was on the sacrifice. And what is the focus of our celebration tonight? It's the Lord's death for us.

And it's no coincidence that we eat and we drink of the sacrifice. And I'm not saying that Christ is sacrificed again or anything like that, but we do eat and drink spiritually of Jesus Christ tonight.

And so Jesus is our fellowship offering. And as we remember his sacrifice, we celebrate God's goodness to us. And so the focus of our celebration has to be the cross.

It has to be the sacrifice. And so the same joy that marked the Old Testament believers should mark us. The early church joined the Lord's Supper with a love feast.

And I'm not suggesting we start to do that. But it does tell you of what kind of spirit we should be enjoying communion. There should be a predominance of joy.

[30:32] There is solemnity. There is a sense of the seriousness of our sin. But where sin abounded, grace super abounded.

And so our sin doesn't have the last word. And sorrow does not have the last word. It is joy that has the last word. And because of Christ's death, we are welcomed in to this room of shalom.

We are welcomed into God's glad smile. And so by Christ's death, God has poured out his peace on us, just like the angel said. And his blessing is all over our life.

And it would be terrible, unbelief, not to celebrate, and not to feel real joy tonight for God's goodness to us.