

Sermon Summary: Life in the Blood

Leviticus 17

Overview

Leviticus 17 focuses repeatedly on blood: where sacrifices are to be offered, the prohibition against eating blood, and the reason blood must be treated with reverence. The central statement is that “the life of a creature is in the blood”, and God has given the blood on the altar to make atonement.

The chapter therefore points beyond the Old Testament sacrifices to Jesus Christ. God himself provides the sacrifice that sinful people need so that they can be reconciled to him, enter his presence and receive life.

1. God Determines How His People Worship

Israel was commanded not to offer sacrifices wherever they pleased. Sacrifices were to be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting and offered to the Lord in the way he had commanded.

This protected Israel from returning to the idolatrous practices around them, including sacrifices to goat idols. Their relationship with God was a covenant relationship, so worshipping other gods was described in the strong language of unfaithfulness.

The application is that worship is not simply about what pleases us. We come before a holy God with humility and repentance, seeking to worship him as he has called us to worship.

2. The Life Is in the Blood

Leviticus 17:11 gives the key to the chapter: the life of the creature is in the blood. Blood is therefore sacred because it represents life and must not be treated casually.

Israel was forbidden to consume blood. When an animal was hunted, its blood was to be drained out. This distinguished Israel from surrounding religious practices in which blood could be consumed as part of pagan ritual.

God had given blood for a particular purpose: to make atonement on the altar. A life was given in place of another life.

3. God Provides a Way into His Presence

Leviticus 1–16 has shown how sinful people can approach the holy God who has chosen to dwell among them. The tabernacle is the place of God's presence, but sinful people cannot simply enter that presence on their own terms.

In sacrifice, the animal acts as a substitute. Its life is given in place of the worshipper's life, and its blood is presented before God. The sacrifice is God's provision, making reconciliation possible.

Atonement is therefore not humanity inventing a way to satisfy God. It begins with God's mercy and grace: God himself provides the way by which his people can come to him.

4. The Sacrifices Point to Jesus

The Old Testament sacrifices point forward to the cross. The sermon describes atonement as God satisfying his own justice by providing the substitute himself.

God is loving, but he is also holy and just. Sin cannot simply be ignored. Judgment is required, yet instead of leaving sinners to bear that judgment themselves, God gives his Son as the substitute.

Jesus therefore fulfils what the sacrifices anticipated. His life is given for ours, his blood is shed, and through him sinful people can be cleansed, reconciled to God and welcomed into his presence.

5. God's Love Is the Source of Atonement

An important emphasis of the sermon is that God did not begin loving us after Christ died or after we turned to him. God's love is not the consequence of the atonement; it is the source of the atonement.

God loved first and therefore made the way for reconciliation. The cross demonstrates the love that was already directed towards sinners. This changes the picture of God from one of merely waiting to punish wrongdoing to the God who actively makes a way for sinners to return to him.

That provides comfort for Christians in difficulty: the God who loved us and made a way for us before we knew him continues to hold our lives in his hands.

6. The Blood of the New Covenant

The Old Testament command not to consume blood gives added significance to Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant." Jesus is not commanding literal consumption of blood; the cup points to his sacrificial death and the life received through him.

The Lord's Supper should therefore be received with reverence. The New Testament fulfilment of the sacrifices does not make Christ's blood less serious. Rather, it reveals the full significance of what those sacrifices anticipated.

Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath so that his people can receive the cup of fellowship and peace with God. Divine justice is satisfied in Christ, and believers receive life through him.

7. What Are We Trusting to Make Us Acceptable?

The sermon finishes by bringing the question of sacrifice into our own hearts. We naturally try to provide sacrifices of our own: morality, religion, church attendance, ministry, success, family life, or comparison with other people.

None of these can make us acceptable before God. God has already provided the sacrifice we need in Jesus Christ.

The question is therefore whether we are trusting what we can bring to God, or trusting the sacrifice God himself has provided. True worship comes before God on his terms, trusting Christ rather than our own goodness or achievements.

Big Idea

The life is in the blood, and God has provided the blood of atonement so that sinful people can come into his presence.

The sacrifices of Leviticus point to Jesus Christ, who gives his life as our substitute. God's love provides the sacrifice, God's justice is satisfied through it, and through Christ we receive forgiveness, reconciliation and life.