Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you think of an example of **total devotion**? One example today might be a husband and wife who stay together until death parts them, despite one of them having dementia for many years. Another might be a professional sports star who plays for one club or province their whole career. But we actually have a much older example of total devotion in the burnt offering of Leviticus 1. Let me explain: We saw last time that the special presence of the Lord had come down to live in the Most Holy Place at the rear of the Tabernacle tent. But God was holy and His people were sinful and unclean, so the only way for God to dwell among His people and for them to be able to draw near to Him in worship was by way of sacrifice. And in ch’s 1-7, God lays out the five offerings that would remove uncleanness and sin – burnt, grain, peace, sin, and guilt. And this first offering, the burnt offering, was about total devotion. You see, with the other four offerings, only some of it was burnt or presented; the rest was eaten by the priests and/or the people, or thrown on the ash heap. But with the burnt offering, all of it was burnt, the whole animal. It was an offering that acknowledged the lordship or complete rule of God; it said, all that I am and all that I have is yours, O Lord.

Now, all of this might be interesting but is it relevant in any way for us as NT believers? Given that we do not have to offer animal sacrifices to God anymore, is there anything we can learn from this offering? There most certainly is! As we saw in connection with the first Leviticus sermon, these OT sacrifices pointed to and were fulfilled by the Lord Jesus. So today we want to see **how the burnt offering points us to Christ as a picture of total devotion**. And as we do this we will see what total devotion looks like for NT believers. we will see this as we note the Lord’s instructions here about the right **gift**, the right **place**, and the right **method**.

1. So first of all, let’s consider the Lord’s instructions about the **Right Gift**.
   1. If you have been invited to a party of some sort, you have had to work out the right gift to offer the person who invited you. And so, for example, as a husband, I learned early on, that a vacuum cleaner is not the right gift for a wife’s birthday. But it’s not easy, is it, to know what the right gift is. There are so many factors that you have to weigh up. And I have to confess that often I don’t give getting the right gift the time it deserves, so it ends up being last minute and general and too cheap or too expensive. Well, if getting the right gift for your spouse or boss or neighbour is tough, then choosing the right gift for God, the majestic, holy, glorious, Creator, is impossible! And if it was up to us, sinful, puny, limited human beings that we are, we would get it wrong, every time. So God spelled out exactly what gift the people of Israel needed to bring as a burnt offering. We see it in three verses – v2, “*You shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock*,” and v10, “*If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats*,” and v14, “*If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons*.” So the rich were to bring a bull, the ‘average income earners’ were to bring a sheep or a goat, and the poor could bring turtledoves or pigeons. So, whatever your economic status, you could demonstrate your total devotion to the Lord with one of these offerings. So let’s now make a few observations about the burnt offering:
      1. First of all, the burnt offering was a ‘**voluntary’** offering. Together with the next two – grain and peace – you could present these offerings whenever you chose to. The last two offerings, the sin offering and the guilt offering, were mandatory; if you committed a sin, you had to go the Tabernacle and present the sin and/or guilt offering. Now, there were some situations where you had to present a burnt offering, but typically it was a voluntary offering. The Father of the home would tell his family that they were going to the Tabernacle to present this offering as a sign of their total devotion to the Lord.
      2. And that leads us to the second observation, which is that this was a **costly** or expensive offering. Notice in v3 that it had to be a “*male without blemish*.” Back then, just as it is now, breeding was a huge part of farming. And it is not as though families had flocks with hundreds or thousands of animals. So to offer a male without blemish; that was a huge sacrifice.
         1. So picture this family. A cow or a nanny goat or a ewe gives birth to a male that is without blemish. Wow! This could improve the family’s whole economic situation. But Dad says, No, we will offer this animal to the Lord as a burnt offering. The Lord deserves our best. But Dad, say the children… No no, my children, the Lord will provide all that we need. This was a powerful teaching moment that was about sacrifice and trust and total devotion to the Lord.
         2. But, if you know your own heart, you can probably guess what happened. I mean, imagine if the government decreed that every home had to donate one television to be given to the poor. And you have a 50 inch 4K TV and a 24 inch LCD one with a scratch on the screen, which would you donate? So imagine the Israelite family: Two male animals are born, one is without blemish and one is blemished, somehow. Which one do you burn on the altar? Or, even better, why offer your unblemished sheep when there is an unblemished sheep in the paddock next door that could somehow find its way into your paddock ;-)
         3. And this is exactly what happened with the people of Israel: Just listen to the Lord’s complaint in **Malachi 1**; He said, “*If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' … When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favour? says the LORD of hosts? … You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. 14 Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.*” Do you see what they did? They began looking for every way that they could present a cheap sacrifice instead of a costly one.
   2. Well, before we move on to think about the right *place* for the offering, there are already some things we can say by way of application here:
      1. And we start with God. As we have seen, the burnt offering was a costly sacrifice. Well, last Sunday, Vicar Nathaniel preached for us from **John 3:16**. How does that verse go, boys and girls? “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son*.” So great is the Father’s love for His chosen people, He gave up His perfect, unblemished Son; He sent Him away to earth and to the cross. And so great is the love of Jesus, He left the Father and lived on earth and was mocked and spat upon and misunderstood, and crucified, and endured the totality of the Father’s wrath at the sins of all His people.
         1. The *right* gift to secure your salvation was the Son of God. Jesus is the *costly* price that the Triune God paid that your sins might be forgiven. And it is all here in shadow form with the burnt offering.
      2. But brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, it is because of the costly sacrifice of Jesus that you no longer have to present a burnt offering. And praise God for that! His one sacrifice on the cross completely removed the sin and guilt of all who trust in Him for their salvation. But if God expected this costly sacrifice from His OT people, do you think He is satisfied with anything less than your total devotion today? If He expected a costly and perfect bull or sheep or pigeon from His OT people, because they were thankful for rescue from slavery in Egypt, then surely you, who have been rescued from slavery to sin, owe Him an even greater debt of thankfulness? Yes?
         1. So as one example of what this means for the Christian life, let’s talk about **tithing** for a moment. Tithing means 10 %. And God expected the people of Israel to present 10% of their income as another costly offering on top of the burnt offering! Now, many people today argue that tithing was an OT law and we do not have to tithe today. And even if we leave that discussion aside today, do you remember the widow and her offering that Jesus commended in Mark 12? The rich showingly put large sums in the offering bowls, but she put in just a penny. But do you remember what Jesus said? Their gift was cheap compared to their riches but she gave all that she had! Her giving was costly/sacrificial. So how about you: Is your giving cheap or costly?
2. But let’s move on now to consider the Lord’s instructions about the Right **Place**.
   1. In v3, God said, “*Bring [your offering] to the entrance to the tent of meeting*.” And this is expanded on in ch. **17:3-4**, “*If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a sheep or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people*.” So it was not enough that you brought the right *gift* to God, you also had to offer it at the right *place* – the courtyard of the tabernacle.
      1. You see, God knew that if He left it up to the people to decide where to present their offerings, they would imitate their pagan neighbours and do it anywhere and everywhere. So there would end up being holy hills and holy rivers and holy buildings, etc. But what made the tabernacle a holy place was not *what the people did there* but the fact that this is where the Lord dwelt, visibly, among His people. So sacrifices were to be made only in the tabernacle courtyard.
   2. But the Lord was even more specific about the right *place* for the offerings. The tabernacle tent was surrounded by a kind of curtain fence that marked off the courtyard area of the tabernacle. So when you came in to the courtyard area, the tabernacle was way at the back. And what stood between you and the tabernacle was this massive, bronze altar, which had burning animals and a plume of smoke rising to the sky, all the time. So look now at vv5&11&15: Where was the animal or bird of offering to be killed? **Beside the altar**. And v11 is very specific; it was to be “*on the North side of the altar*.” Do you see how this was a powerful visual lesson for the people? What made it possible for them to approach God in worship was sacrifice. The way to God was by sacrifice.
   3. Now, we noted in the previous sermon that eventually the glorious presence of the Lord left the tabernacle/temple and the Ark was stolen away and eventually the temple was utterly destroyed. So let me ask you this question: What is the right place for our worship today?
      1. Well, it is not this building. This building, in and of itself, is not a holy place. And it is not St Peters in Rome or any other church. And it is not Jerusalem. Don’t ever think that if you get the chance to visit the Sea of Galilee or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or any of the famous sites in the so-called ‘holy-land,’ that they are holy places. They are not!
      2. Brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, the right place for our worship today is not a place but a **person** – the Lord Jesus Christ! And we know this because it is spelled out in the Book of Hebrews. Our priest? Jesus. Our better Covenant? Jesus. Our Tabernacle? Jesus. Our altar? Jesus. Our sacrifice? Jesus. The blood that cleanses us? Jesus’ blood.
         1. **10:10**, “*We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*.” **13:10-12**, In Jesus, “*we have an altar …* [He] *suffered ... to sanctify the people through His own blood*.” **10:19**, “*We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus*.”
      3. And all this is why Jesus said, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*.” Do you see that? It’s not about a GPS address for us; it is about faith in Jesus – believing in Him as our Saviour and Lord. That is what brings us together on the Lord’s Day, with the Lord’s people, and what makes this place, or wherever we might be, the place where the Lord delights to dwell among His people.
3. But let’s complete our study of the burnt offering by considering the Lord’s instructions about the Right **Method** as our third point.
   1. A couple of weeks ago they held the funeral for the police officer who was shot and killed at Eden Park. And I don’t know if you saw any of the funeral but a NZ flag was taken from the coffin and carefully folded and presented to Constable Hunt’s family. There was a mass Haka and the hearse drove the coffin out of the park with a guard of honour either side of the pathway. Now, do you think everyone turned up on the day and just decided what to do on the fly? Uh huh. The whole ceremony was very carefully planned, down to the tiniest detail.
   2. And it was exactly the same with the burnt offering. We have already seen that the right *gift* was regulated by God, and there was a right place for the sacrifice.
      * And we see in v4 that the **worshipper** first had to lay his hands on the offering to identify with the offering. Then vv5&11 explain that if it was a bull or a sheep or goat, the worshipper had to kill it himself. And that is hard to imagine for the many of us who think meat comes from Pak-N-Save ☺ right! And then the worshipper had to skin the bull or sheep or goat and then cut it up into the required pieces. And last of all, he had to wash all of the dung off the legs and the entrails or bowels with water so that it was clean.
      * What the **priests** had to do was catch the blood that spurted out of the neck, sprinkle that on the altar, arrange the wood of the altar fire and light it, and then put the parts of the animal on the altar. And I say priests, plural, because according to my research, 6 priests assisted with a young sheep or goat, 12 if it was a full grown Ram, and 24 if it was a bull! But if the offering was a bird, the priest killed it by wringing off its head, sprinkling its blood on the altar, removing the feathers and the crop, which is where pre-digested food is stored before it enters the stomach, throwing all that on the ash heap, tearing the bird open, but not in half, and then burning it on the altar. How does that all sound, boys and girls? Eww yuk!
      1. But the key point here is that everything about this offering was regulated by God. There was no, what are we going to do today? It was all about doing what the Lord had commanded. And we will have plenty of opportunity to explore this in more detail on our journey through Leviticus, but what we have seen about the *right* gift and the *right* place and the right *method* is why we, as a church, hold to what is called **the regulative principle of worship**. And congregation, the RPW simply means this – the worship of God must be regulated by God. What we do in here on Sundays is not about what I like or what you like, but about what God has commanded.
         1. And this is not just an OT principle. Think of Jesus when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, which included worship temptations. How did Jesus respond, each time? “*It is written*…” Jesus would only worship as God had commanded. And so should we. **1 Corinthians 14:40** is in the context of discussions about public worship. It says,“*But all things should be done decently and in order*.” Whose order? God’s!
         2. So the burnt offering reminds us that we are not free to worship God as we please; we worship according to His command.
      2. But notice also that the purpose of the burnt offering is summed up in three words that all begin with the letter A. See if you can spot them, boys and girls. The first is in v3 – **Accepted**. The second is in v4 – **Atonement**. And the third is repeated in vv 9, 13, and 17 – **Aroma**.
         1. So when the worshiper arrived at the tabernacle, he was not acceptable to God or at-one with God, because of his sin, and he could not draw near to God. So the first thing the worshiper did was to put his hand on the head of the offering, signifying substitution – I deserve to die because of my sin but you will die in my place. And after the animal was killed and put on the altar, the smell of the burning meat rose up to heaven and God said, because of this sacrifice, I now accept you, we are at-one, you may draw near to me.
         2. So here is what all this means today. If you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you are not acceptable to God; you are not at-one with God. And if this does not change, you will be condemned to eternal burning in the fire of hell. But today you have heard the way of escape! There is no bull or goat here for you to lay your hand on as a substitute sacrifice. What you must do is take hold of Jesus as your substitute sacrifice. That means to believe in Him as the Son of God, and that He died on the cross to make you acceptable to God and at-one with God. **Ephesians 5:2** says, “*Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*.” Christ’s work on the cross is the pleasing aroma that makes it possible for you to draw near to God today. Will you believe this, today? He is your only hope of salvation.
      3. And that brings us, finally, to the believer’s total devotion.
         1. **Hebrews 13:15** says, “*Through [Christ] … let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name*.” Do you know what the best equivalent of the burnt offering is for believers today? It is **prayer offered in Jesus’ name**. And this doesn’t just mean any prayer that includes the words “in Jesus’ name” at the end; it means the prayer of the person who truly believes in Jesus. But, if you believe, when you say, “in Jesus’ name,” you are expressing your total devotion to God – your thankfulness for the finished work of Jesus, your complete trust in God, your worship of Him, your willingness to serve Him with all that you are and all that you have.
         2. When you publicly professed faith, you promised to “*forsake the world, put to death their old nature, and lead a godly life*.” It is a vow of total devotion. In **Mark 12**, Jesus agreed with a person who summed up the Christian life in this way: “*To love [God] with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*.” So is this the life you are striving to live? Are your thoughts, words, and actions totally devoted to Christ?
         3. If so, then remember Jesus’ promise that we read earlier in the service, “*Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life*.”

Brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, to be a follower of Jesus is to be totally devoted to Jesus. It is costly but the rewards are eternal! Amen.