

Rights and Responsibilities

Leviticus 21-22

Leviticus series #17

October 2, 2022

PreSermon Comments

- Two chapters today, jump ahead then back, b/c in 2 weeks Rabbi Matt
- Next series Jude, then Advent

Introduction

- In 2016, I got to sing the anthem at Fenway Park. Amazing experience, but lots of “don’ts”
- In life: privilege vs. pressure, rights vs. responsibilities
 - Life in general, but even more so with leadership
- Why are we talking about this? Because Leviticus 21-22 is all about the priesthood
 - Privileges they enjoy, certain rights they have as leaders
 - But also responsibilities, certain standards they must embody
- This is relevant for two reasons:
 - First, we all have places of authority and leadership, so we need to learn how to balance the rights/privileges and the responsibilities/pressures
 - Second, these chapters teach us about Jesus in a really unique sort of way
- So, let’s explore for a little while, and we will land at our big idea at the end
 - 1) What did it mean back then, 2) what does it mean for us today, 3) how does it point us to Jesus?

I. Understanding the “Back Then”

Priestly Rights (dipping back in Leviticus a little bit)

1. Power | 10:10-11 *...teach the Israelites all the statutes...*
 - a. These are the guys in charge, they render clean/unclean, authority
2. Proximity | 16:3-5 *Aaron is to enter the most holy place in this way...*
 - a. They get to be in the center of the action. High priest at the center of the action
3. Praise | 21:8, 10 *You are to consider him holy...The priest who is highest among his brothers...*
 - a. Honor and respect, they get to wear the fancy clothes
4. Provision | 22:10-16 *No one outside a priest's family is to eat the holy offering.*
 - a. This is how the whole tribe of Levi gets to eat!

These are some amazing privileges! But they also come with some weighty responsibilities.

Priestly Standards

- Family deaths | 21:1-4
 - Can't be defiled by touching a dead body, *except* for closest family members
 - Side note: go read the Good Samaritan with more understanding
- Priestly appearance | 21:5-6
 - No pagan appearances like gashes or hair cuts | also about grieving the dead
- Marriage standards | 21:7-9
 - No marrying a divorcee or someone who's been promiscuous
- Physical defects | 21:16-24
 - No blind, lame, mutilation or deformity, even the reproductive organs
 - Why? Because the tent is mini-Eden. One day, there will be none of those.
- Ritual impurities | 22:1-9
 - Discharges, touching the dead, skin disease, unclean swarming creature
 - Bath and wash, unclean until the next day. You might miss work.

High Priest Standards

- Clothing and appearance | 21:10
 - Even higher standard: no disheveled hair or torn clothes, mourning for dead
- Family deaths | 21:11-12
 - No touching the dead, not even immediate family like father and mother
- Marriage standards | 21:13-15
 - No marrying even a widow, only a virgin
 - This is about keeping the bloodlines super clear for succession

**Maybe some of these don't make sense to us in our culture, but similar to "don't touch grass" at Fenway*
Jay Sklar These chapters teach that priests are held to higher standards than other Israelites...[T]he Lord calls the priests to a special role as those who serve constantly in the courts of his palace. And since the Lord is a holy King, it is especially important that his palace servants maintain their holy status, not only so they can come near him, but also to communicate to his people how much he values holiness. If the palace servants desecrate their holy status, it would show that they thought little of their privileged position and could suggest to others that the King cared little about holiness. (This is loosely comparable to a surgeon's assistant who leaves the operating room, comes into contact with germs and bacteria, and then goes back into the operating room. Not only would this show how little the assistant thought of his position; it could communicate to others that the surgeon himself cared little about cleanliness.) In short, those in special roles of service are held to higher standards, not only so they can continue in their role, but also so they communicate properly to others the values of the one they serve.

II. How Do We Interact With These Ideas?

1. Increased authority means increased rights and responsibilities
 - a. Example 1: company credit card in business
 - i. Use the card! Buy things! But don't waste, personal use.
 - b. Example 2: teacher in a school.
 - i. Power, provision, praise, proximity(?)
 - ii. But don't yell at kids, age-appropriate content
 - c. Example 3: ministry leaders in the NT
 - i. Power Heb 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them*
 - ii. Provision 1 Cor 9 ³ *My defense to those who examine me is this: ⁴ Don't we have the right to eat and drink?...Don't muzzle the ox... ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel.*
 - iii. Proximity - not necessarily closer to God, but closer to the intimate details of the lives of people. Front row witness to amazing work of God!
 - iv. Praise 1 Tim 5:17 *The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*
2. It is good to embrace responsibility | Luke 12:48 *To whom much is given, much is expected*
 - a. Do not be like politicians (many of whom are lawyers). Inherently defensive.
 - b. Kids start in classroom leadership
3. It is good to exercise rights
 - a. Jesus: instructed his disciples, "go to this town" or "go find food"
 - b. Paul: 1 cor 9, but also appealing to Roman citizenship in Phillipi w/ Silas
4. Both rights and responsibilities can be misused
 - a. Misuse of rights and privileges
 - i. Power becomes abuse
 - ii. Proximity becomes distance
 - iii. Praise becomes pride
 - iv. Provision becomes greed
 - v. **This is why so many have rejected leadership overall
 - b. Misuse of responsibility??
 - i. Over-responsibility. You fail to recognize your finiteness, limitations
 1. Priests high responsibility, but flawed and impure
 2. Holy *like* God is holy, but not God himself
 - ii. Resentment. Bitterness and martyr attitude, "you don't appreciate me"

So what is the solution to these problems? The gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. What About Jesus?

1. The eternal Son of God, 2nd person of the Trinity, holds every right
 - a. Proximity - infinitely close with the persons of the Trinity
 - b. Power - he created all things by the word of his power
 - c. Praise - he deserves anything good we could say or think
 - d. Provision - though he needs nothing, it all belongs to him.
2. The Son of God took on ultimate responsibility
 - a. Left the proximity of heaven to come to earth
 - b. He divested himself of divine power (though never ceasing to be God)
 - c. He took on scorn instead of praise
 - d. He took responsibility for our sins - **dying a DEATH that we deserved**
3. The Son of God is highly exalted
 - a. Raised from the dead in power, exalted to heaven to receive praise
 - b. Now he is responsible not only for upholding the universe by the word of his power, but also responsible to keep to the end every one of his redeemed.

(big idea) *Jesus holds ultimate responsibility and deserves ultimate praise*

Now Because of Jesus

1. We can embrace responsibility *and* know our limits
 - a. Which ditch do you trend toward?
2. We can use our rights *or* lay them aside
 - a. Paul didn't always pull the Roman citizen card, he also went to jail
 - b. Jesus gave orders and instructions, and he was silent like a sheep
3. We can embrace wisdom in all things
 - a. No one-size-fits all approach. Exercising wisdom in parenting, business, ministry.

Scripture Reading

Leviticus 21 ¹⁰The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes. ¹¹He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother. ¹²He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him: I am the Lord. ¹³And he shall take a wife in her virginity. ¹⁴A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people, ¹⁵that he may not profane his offspring among his people, for I am the Lord who sanctifies him.