

God gives back the most holy part

Read: Leviticus 2:1-3 with focus on verse 3

In the OT, before Jesus came, worship services were much more complicated. They included a lot of rituals and ceremonies that may seem very strange to you. For instance, every day, there were two services in which a sheep was killed, butchered and burn on an altar. The priests were busy with many other rituals in the temple too.

I want to reflect on one of those sacrifices - the grain offering - and then only on a part of that sacrifice: the most holy part of it.

The grain offering was the only offering by fire that was not an animal or bird. The person who offered it presented to the priest some finely ground flour, mixed with vegetable oil and frankincense. The worshipper then took a handful of this mixture and threw it on the hot altar and it would be burned instantly. The rest of the offering was given to the priest - it is called "a most holy part of the Lord's food offering".

I want to ask two questions about this sacrifice: what does it mean when God calls it the most holy part, and then: how is that relevant today.

The part of the grain offering that was left over and given to the priest, is called "most holy". What does that mean? Well, to God it was the most precious part of the sacrifice.

What do you do with things that are especially precious to you? People sometimes show me things that are especially precious to them. This has happened to me a couple times in the recent past. As a pastor, I'm visiting someone and talk turns to their family. In my community, most people are single. The only other significant person in their life is their parents, a sibling or maybe a spouse who has passed away. And he opens his wallet and gently pull out a photo, carefully unfold it and show me: this is someone they loved. It is a sacred moment. He is a little anxious, hoping that I'll say something nice about the photo, and then he'll lovingly stow it back in his wallet.

When the grain offering is called "most holy to the Lord" that suggests to me that it is precious to God in that way. He is was inclined to protect it, store it away for his own pleasure and share it only with those whom he trusted very highly. The grain offering was the type of sacrifice that would often accompany the making of a treaty, so that giving of grain or bread was a pledge on the part of the person giving it, that he would keep his promise and be faithful to the covenant that they had made. That is why the giving of a loaf of bread remains a very special gift in nearly all cultures.

And God loved that more than anything else. Because he was Yahweh. The most important thing that he wanted his people to know was that he would do what he said and he could be relied on. He was faithful. All he wanted from her people was for them to reflect something of

his qualities, for his children to mirror the values of their heavenly father. And when they gave the grain offering, that is what they were promising: to be faithful like God. That's why it was so precious to God.

So did he store the grain offering for himself like most do with the things that are precious to them? No. God accepted a handful on the altar - that was his portion, but the rest was given to the priest. It was given to the ministers of the gospel, the families that supported the men who preached the gospel with words and sacrifices and other sacred ceremonies in the temple.

So how is that relevant to us today? Well, Jesus Christ offered the last sacrifice, when he died on the cross. God wants no more animals to be killed in worship, no more fires to burn sacrifices. But he still loves to receive gifts from us, and pledges of loyalty from his people that they will do what they promise him - like obey his law and love him more than anything else in all the world.

So what shall we give him? There is only one thing left to give and that is ourselves. Give yourself to God. Promise that you will do anything for him, all that he commands, not because God needs anything from you but because you just love him for what he has already done for you. And to God, that will be regarded as the most precious part, the holiest of gifts that he could ever receive from the world. You.