

No Longer and Not Like

Kicking It Off

What is a gift you remember enjoying giving even more than the person enjoyed getting it?

Read

Leviticus 20:1-8, 22-26; 18:19-30

Summary

Leviticus 18 and 20 are the chapters people reach for in arguments. They talk about sex, about idols, and about death penalties, and it's easy to read them as a list of things God hates. But chapter 20 opens somewhere you might not expect, with parents giving their children to a god called Molech. In the ancient world, when the gods seemed angry or life felt out of control, people paid to make it stop. A ram, then two rams, and finally a child, the most valuable thing they had, handed over to buy safety or a blessing.

God calls those children His. Think about a newborn. She can't bathe herself or feed herself. She takes your money, your sleep, and your free time, and she gives nothing back, and that's exactly how God meant it to work. He made the world to run on giving. Sin turns it around until even a child becomes something to spend on my own comfort, and that grasping heart lives in all of us, not just in ancient Canaan.

The same heart shows up in how we handle sex. God's lines here aren't random. They go back to how He made us, male and female, joined in a covenant where sex is something you give to someone who has promised to lay down their life for you. And before anyone points a finger, the Bible uses the same word, "abomination," for dishonesty, a lying tongue, and haughty eyes. All of us are broken somewhere, and none of us can fix ourselves.

That's where the good news comes in. God says, "I am the LORD who sanctifies you." He's the one who washes us, again and again, like a father bathing his child. And at the cross He turns Molech upside down. Instead of us giving up a child to get a blessing, God gave His own Son to bless us, and that sends us out as people who give.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Molech's worshipers handed over their children to calm their fears or to buy a blessing (Leviticus 20:1-5). What have you been tempted to give up for the sake of your own comfort or success?
3. God calls the children "my children," and He holds the whole community responsible when it closes its eyes to harm (Ezekiel 16:20-21; Leviticus 20:4-5). Who is someone vulnerable in your life that it would be easier to look away from?
4. The Bible uses the word "abomination" for dishonesty, a lying tongue, and haughty eyes, not only for sexual sin (Deuteronomy 25:16; Proverbs 6:16-19). Which sin do you find it easiest to see in others and hardest to see in yourself?
5. God says, "I am the LORD who sanctifies you," and His work in us is slow and ongoing (Leviticus 20:8). Where do you need to stop trying to fix yourself and let God wash you instead?
6. God gave His own Son to bless people who had nothing to give back (Hebrews 13:12; 1 Corinthians 6:11). Who is one person you could be generous toward this week who can't repay you?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"The people who were giving their children as sacrifice did not have the same heart that I have when I look at my kids. When my kids are sick, I wish I was sick instead of them. I wish I could take away their sickness and that they could be healthy. But sin takes that love God gave us and looks at a child and says, 'I will give you up so that I can gain. I will give up this innocent child's life so that I can be blessed.' And if you are thinking it's them, I'm saying it's me. It's how I operate."

"The heart of God is not one in which He looks at the vulnerable and says, 'What can you do for Me?' The heart of our Father in heaven looks at us and says, 'What can I do for you?' He is not a God that looks at the vulnerable and says, 'Well, they need to fend for themselves.' He looks at the little children and says that they are His."

"If you're looking at one thing and saying, 'See, God calls that an abomination,' I want you to know that the moment you call someone else's sin an abomination without understanding that you are an abomination, you have gone too far. Deuteronomy says anyone who's dishonest is an abomination. This is my sin as well. I lust. I have to be careful. I love my wife and I want to honor her, but do I struggle with a broken sexual ethic? Absolutely. And there is only one who can save me from it."

"When I gave my daughter a bath, I didn't say, 'She's broken and I need to fix her.' When I was washing her, did she wash herself? No. I washed her. Was she going to get dirty again? Yes. And I will wash her again and again. So if you're dealing with a broken sexual ethic (and we all are), understand that it is God

who sanctifies you. It's not you who fixes you. Before, it was people giving their child to Molech so that the god would bless them. Now God is the one who gives you His child to bless you."

Sermon Notes

Leviticus 20:1-8

20 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. 3 I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. 4 And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, 5 then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

6 “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. 7 Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. 8 Keep my statutes and do them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

Leviticus 20:22-26

22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. 24 But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

Outline

1. The Children Are Mine - Leviticus 20:1-6; 18:21; Ezekiel 16:20-21
   a. It is better to give than to receive, and it is baked into creation. I learned it holding my children and watching Grace give up teaching to stay home with them.
   b. Molech's worshipers gave their children to calm an angry god or to buy a blessing: a ram, then two rams, and finally the child.
   c. Sin takes a parent's love and says, "I will give you up so that I can gain." If you think that's only them, I'm telling you it's me.
   d. God calls them "my children" (Ezekiel 16:20-21). A newborn can't bathe or feed herself, and God looks at the vulnerable, the sojourner included, and asks, "What can I do for you?"
   e. No one is exempt, not even the sojourner (20:2), and the people who close their eyes answer to God along with the man (20:4-5).

2. From the Beginning
   a. Leviticus 18:19-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 25:16; Proverbs 6:16-19
   b. The church tells a brother, "Stop doing that." An unrepentant adulterer is not excused while his wife and kids get used to it, and we protect the vulnerable by discipline, not stones, within our own household rather than by legislating the nations.
   c. Every one of these sins can be atoned for by Christ's blood, and the ethic is kept only by the Spirit.
   d. Without a Creator there is no sexual ethic, and Jesus answers by going back to creation (Matthew 19:4-6).
   e. God meant sex to be giving, inside a covenant that says, "I will lay my life down for you." No prophylactic gives that protection.
   f. Scripture also calls dishonesty and a lying tongue an abomination (Deuteronomy 25:16; Proverbs 6:16-19). Call another's sin an abomination without seeing your own and you've gone too far. I lust, and I'm broken too.
   g. Shared brokenness can talk itself into calling greed good. God's answer to greed is generosity, the heart of a parent who lets the kids eat first.

3. That You Should Be Mine - Leviticus 20:7-8, 26; 18:5; Hebrews 13:11-12; 1 Corinthians 6:11
   a. We keep these laws because we want to dwell with God, and His mercy is that He wants to dwell with us.
   b. "I am the LORD who sanctifies you" (20:8). Sanctification is progressive, and God does it, so we walk with broken people instead of demanding perfection now.
   c. I can't fix anyone. I bathed my daughter, she didn't wash herself, and I washed her again and again.
   d. Molech's worshipers gave a child to get a blessing; God gave His Son to bless us (Hebrews 13:11-12).

e. Washed, sanctified, justified (1 Corinthians 6:11), we go out as givers. Our call is to love people, not to condemn them.

Notes

It is better to give than to receive. Most people know that, and the older I get, the more I believe giving is the greater of the two. Yesterday over a hundred kids came to our church, and we gave them candy and a safe, warm place to play and got nothing back, which was the point. I learned this most as a father. When my children were small I held them and told them, "I'll give you everything, and everything I have is yours." Friends pitied Grace and me because we had kids young and spent our money on diapers. When Grace left teaching to stay home after Emory was born, that looked crazy too. But watching her give her life to our children showed me something about how God made the world. One of the rules baked deep into creation is that giving is better than receiving.

That matters because Leviticus 18 and 20 are the hot topic chapters of the book. People reach for them in arguments about politics and voting, as if this were simply how God relates to the world. I knew before this series began that this would be one of the hardest sermons to preach. I'm not afraid of controversy. I want you to see that God is showing Israel His economy, His moral framework for the world, and He isn't trying to choke you.

Chapter 20 opens with child sacrifice. The ancient world offered children to the gods, as Agamemnon does in Christopher Nolan's Odyssey, and we shake our heads. Molech was one of the gods of the nations around Israel. Israel was drawn to him again and again, until Josiah said God's word forbids it. People did this because they expected something back. The gods were angry and danger kept coming, so they tried to calm the storm. Give a ram. If that fails, give two. And Molech wanted the children. Some gave a child to quiet their fear, and others to buy a blessing: Molech, bless my crops.

Those parents did not have the heart I have when I look at my kids. When my kids are sick, I wish I were sick instead. Sin takes that love God gave us, looks at a child, and says, "I will give you up so that I can gain." It sounds ridiculous, but it is the heart of a sinful person, and if you're thinking it's them, I'm telling you it's me. My wife and I have chosen our own pleasure and lived as though life is about what you can give me. The sin economy deceives us into thinking life is about receiving, and God says life is about what we can give.

Ezekiel 16 tells us why God finds child sacrifice detestable: "you slaughtered my children." These children are His. He said it to His own people, who called on His name while keeping altars to Molech. Children are the most vulnerable people in any society.

When Emory was born, the nurse handed her to me to bathe, and I had never bathed a baby. She was crying and slippery, and all I could think was, I don't want to drop you. She could not bathe herself or feed herself. She would take my income, my food, my free time, and my sleep, and that is how God intended it: you give to your children. At the base of our sin is a desire to receive so strong that a person will throw a child who can't exist on her own into the fire for his own comfort. The God we serve looks at those who can't take care of themselves, the sojourner and the immigrant included, and He doesn't throw them away. We are good to them because we're called to be, not because they produce. Our Father in heaven doesn't look at the vulnerable and ask, "What can you do for Me?" He asks, "What can I do for you?"

The law binds even the sojourner, so no one gets to say it's simply his custom. And if the people of the land close their eyes, God sets His face against that man and his clan (20:4-5). A community must protect its most vulnerable. That is why I believe in church membership, not for salvation, but because a church that follows Scripture tells a brother, "Stop doing that." If a man is having an affair and refuses to stop when the elders come to him, the church cannot say he found the love of his life and his wife and kids will have to get used to it. Those kids belong to the Lord, and if they could speak they would ask why no one is standing up for their mom. I've seen leaders sweep things like that under the rug while the most vulnerable were dragged through the coals. Discipline comes in submission to the Holy Spirit and says, "We love you, but what you are doing does not reflect the character of God." I thank God that in the light of Christ's blood we are not called to put anyone to death, yet the responsibility remains. This concerns our own household. The nations around us worship whom they want, and in our family we worship one God.

Chapter 18 lays out a sexual ethic, but the foundation comes first. All of these sins can be atoned for by the blood of Christ. God isn't asking you to keep a pure sexual ethic on your own strength. You keep it only by being led by the Spirit, and you are forgiven for breaking it only by the blood of Jesus.

Leviticus keeps pointing back to creation, and that is where the world and I part ways. If nothing created all of this, there can be no sexual ethic. Sex becomes a mechanism, like breathing or sleeping, and it means whatever we decide. My friends think I'm crazy for believing God made the world and loves me. But because I believe it, it isn't hard to believe He has a way for me to experience sex as He intended. He meant it to be giving rather than receiving, and He tied it to marriage so it would be safe, a gift of yourself to your spouse inside a covenant that says, "We are one flesh, and I will die for you." The world still longs for that, because it's baked into us. Cut loose from covenant, sex has become meaningless, and no prophylactic gives you the protection of

knowing the person beside you will lay down their life for you. People say Jesus never talked about this, but He did, by going back to creation: "he who created them from the beginning made them male and female" (Matthew 19:4). We did not invent that distinction.

I'm more of a people pleaser than you realize, and I'd love to tell every community what it wants to hear. But Scripture drives our faith, and I'm no better than you. What frustrates me is the idea that this passage is all about homosexuality and that Christians hate gay people. God gave this word to tell all of us that our sexual ethic is broken, and never to teach anyone to hate. People love that 18:22 says "abomination." Deuteronomy 25:16 says everyone who acts dishonestly is an abomination too, and Proverbs 6 adds haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and one who sows discord among brothers. The moment you call someone else's sin an abomination without seeing your own, you've gone too far. A selfish heart that wants the whole world to serve it is my sin as well. My parents told me not to say this from the pulpit, but I lust, and I have to be careful. I love my wife and want to honor her, and I still struggle with a broken sexual ethic. Only one person can save me from it.

There is a danger on the other side. A community can feel its brokenness so deeply that it decides it isn't broken. We're all greedy, so maybe greed is good, and we can sit like dragons on mountains of gold. I have no moral authority to call that wrong, but Scripture does. The sports betting ads during football practically write my sermons, promising that if you play well enough, you'll have a good life. Maybe the world is wrong. God's answer to greed is generosity, and not only once you're secure. It's the heart of a parent. When the meal is small, I love letting my kids eat first. The world says eat what you want and let the kids have your scraps, and the love of God goes the other way.

If you read Leviticus as rules to keep or else, you've read it wrong. You keep them because you want to dwell with God, and that is His mercy, because God shouldn't want to be with you. You aren't interesting enough or good enough. But He does, and that still makes little sense to me. "Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy... I am the LORD who sanctifies you" (20:7-8). Sanctification is progressive, not instantaneous. If gay people came into our church, we would not tell them to be perfect right now, because we don't talk to anyone that way. Life is a journey of walking together, so don't be afraid of living with broken people. I'm broken too, and I have struggles I may carry to my grave. It frustrates me when people try to change someone else's sexuality. I can't, and you can't, but God can. I can't fix you, but I can introduce you to the One who sanctifies. When I washed my newborn daughter, I didn't treat her as broken. She didn't wash herself. I washed her, and when she got dirty again, I washed her again. If you're dealing with a broken sexual ethic, and we all are, it is God who sanctifies you. "You shall be holy

to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine" (20:26).

Molech's worshipers gave their children so that the god would bless them. Christianity is the exact opposite. God loved you so much that He gave His only Son, and He turns child sacrifice on its head. We do not give our child to get a blessing. God gives us His Son to bless us, and "Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:12). He was generous to me while I was still a sinner, so I am to be generous and loving to those who hate me and to those who are still sinners. That is what it means to be holy as He is holy. We have received the blood of His Son and been washed clean, and God, who decides what is clean, has declared you clean. So go into the world as givers. The church's fault is that it stays so interested in making everyone else follow its rules. Legislating the nations around us is not useful. Telling them that Jesus loves them in their brokenness and died for them is. "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (1 Corinthians 6:11). God cares about these little children and about how you use your body, and He has forgiven you. So we don't go out to condemn, mock, or fix the world. Our call is to love it.

Blog

Back in early October, when we read the first five verses of Leviticus 18. This week we'll read Leviticus 20:1-8 and 22-26 together, and we'll spend time in back in chapter 18. These are some of the hardest chapters in the book to read out loud. God makes rules here about sex, about child sacrifice, and about not becoming like the cultures around Israel, because the people of Israel were either committing these sins already or soon would be.

Chapter 20 opens with this: "Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death" (20:2).

So who was Molech? The Bible tells us less than you might expect, and what it does tell us is enough. Solomon built a high place for him "on the mountain east of Jerusalem" (1 Kings 11:7). Later, two kings of Judah burned their own sons as offerings (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). It happened in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, at a place called Topheth (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 33:6). God's response through Jeremiah is striking. They built Topheth "to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind" (Jeremiah 7:31). Through Ezekiel, He calls those children "my children" (Ezekiel 16:21).

Why would anyone do it? Micah puts the question in the worshiper's own mouth. "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6-7). The price keeps rising because the worshiper is trying to buy something from God, and a child was the most a person could give. God's answer comes in the next verse: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8).

Before Leviticus 20 says anything about anyone's sexuality, it guards a child. And it doesn't leave that child's protection to only the parent. The law covers everyone in the land, Israelite and foreigner alike, and then God holds the whole community responsible: "And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan" (20:4-5). The community has a responsibility. Looking away is named as a sin of its own.

Some of you are already thinking about abortion as you read this. So am I, and I want to talk about it carefully on Sunday. If anything, Sunday wont be a call to political action, but rather, it is going to talk about the church's role in supporting one another to

be holy as God is holy. If that's part of your story, please hear this first: this is not to condemn you.

Then the list. Most of chapter 18 names relationships God forbids, and the paragraph near its end (18:19-23) puts five things side by side: a man with a woman during her period, a man with his neighbor's wife, a parent giving a child to Molech, a man with a man, and anyone with an animal. Chapter 20 repeats most of the list and attaches penalties to it, many of them death.

Most of us already know that Christian sexual ethics are different from the world's. Fewer of us could explain why. And there's a fair question underneath. Is a sin like this detestable forever and always, or is it a culturally applied proposition? This chapter seems to give a very clear prohibition against gay sex, so how we read it matters. Two weeks ago, when we came to tattoos in Leviticus 19:28, I didn't treat them as permanently wrong, because the verse itself ties those marks to mourning "for the dead," a practice of Israel's neighbors. So why not read 18:22 the same way?

Leviticus helps us answer that, and it's worth reading slowly. Look at what it says about the nations who lived in Canaan before Israel: "by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (18:24-25). Those nations never stood at Sinai. They never received this law, and they were judged for these things anyway. The next verse applies the same lines to "either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you" (18:26), the foreigner living in Israel as well as the Israelite.

Now look at what chapter 20 does with food. "I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean" (20:24-25). The food laws were tied to Israel being set apart from the nations. That's why Deuteronomy lets an Israelite give an animal that died on its own, which he couldn't eat, to the foreigner living in his town (Deuteronomy 14:21). No nation in the Bible is ever judged for eating pork. Leviticus is already telling us which of its laws marked Israel off from the nations, and which ones every people answers for. The full answer reaches back further than Sinai.

If you hear 18:22 as a verdict on you, notice where it sits. It's in a paragraph with adultery. Every one of us is somewhere in this paragraph, and none of us gets to read it as a list of other people's sins.

Then there are the death sentences. I don't want anything hidden in this passage. These verses show the severity of the passage, how seriously God took these sins, and I'll be honest that I'm still working out everything I want to say about them. What I can say now is that Israel was a nation under God's covenant, and its penalties belonged to that nation. The New Testament never tells the church to stone anyone. When Paul faced a

case in the church at Corinth that came straight out of Leviticus 18:8, a man living with his father's wife, he told the church to remove the man "so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

On my first read through this chapter, I wasn't sure I saw mercy in it. It's mostly lines and penalties. But read the two places where God stops to explain Himself. The first comes right after Molech and the mediums: "Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you" (20:7-8). The second closes the chapter's call to holiness: "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine" (20:26).

The order matters. God is the one who sanctifies His people, and He set them apart "that you should be mine." Holiness in this chapter starts with belonging. These lines were given to people He had already claimed, and He gave them for their life. Chapter 18 opened with that promise: "if a person does them, he shall live by them" (18:5). God absolutely cares, and He has a plan for us regarding our sexuality and the way we handle these things. His plan is life.

Read Leviticus 20 this week, all of it, and the end of chapter 18 (18:19-30). Then read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Paul's list there covers much of the same ground, and then he writes, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (6:11). Notice the past tense, and notice the word "sanctified." Come Sunday ready to hear why these lines exist, who they protect, and where the mercy in this chapter is.