

Sunday Morning Message

February 9, 2020

The Downward Spiral

Text – Leviticus 10

Congregational Reading – Leviticus 10:1 - 3

Introduction

These messages that I have been preaching on Sunday mornings have come straight out our morning devotional readings. Typically, I preach topical rather expository messages on Sunday mornings, and as I read through the Bible every day, there are literally dozens of interesting and relevant topics that I come across that can be developed into messages.

This week in our devotions, beginning on Monday, we have been reading through the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus is a Book that a lot of Christians want to avoid and even dismiss as not being relevant or practical for today, but I disagree. There is a lot of practical truth in these Old Testament passages. We must remember that, though we are not “under the Law” as far as keeping the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices, etc., we can still learn about God’s moral principles for living from these Old Testament Books. Whatever God taught as being morally wrong in the Old Testament is still morally wrong today. In Leviticus 18, which is actually today’s reading, God’s moral laws regarding marriage and sexuality are discussed.

In Leviticus this week, we have been reading about all of the sacrifices that God commanded this wandering congregation of Israel to observe in their Tabernacle. It is important to remember that none of these sacrifices actually atoned for anybody’s sin, but they pictured the sacrifice that Christ would make on the Cross, and reminded Israel that someday their sins would be atoned for through if they put their faith in God and their coming Messiah.

This week, we also read, from Leviticus 11, about God’s dietary laws for the Old Testament Jews as they travelled through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. Cindy wrote a very good blog article on Thursday from that passage. On Friday, we saw from Leviticus 13, how that the Old Testament priest was a doctor of sorts. He had to diagnose various diseases among the people, like leprosy (Hansen’s Disease). He was also responsible for keeping people with contagious diseases quarantined away from the rest of the congregation.

Yesterday, Pastor Stahl wrote about how all of these Old Testament Laws point us to and even picture the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. Today’s blog reading from Leviticus 16 – 18 talk about the Day of Atonement, which also pointed to Christ; and the significance of the blood, because the blood represented life. Even that passage pictured and pointed to the blood of Christ that would be shed for man’s sins.

Transition

In Leviticus 10 we read about a very interesting, yet tragic story regarding Nadab and Abihu who were two of the sons of the High Priest, Aaron. They served as well as priests, assisting their father as he ministered to the people of God in the Old Testament Tabernacle. In the three verses that we read already from this chapter, we learned that these two boys were killed because they offered "strange fire before the Lord." This morning we will find out what that means, and we will also see what may have caused them to do what they did that led to their deaths. Then we will see how this tragic event led to major discouragement and even depression, which caused Aaron and his other two sons to make even more bad decisions.

The practical application from all of this is that we will see:

Bad decisions often lead to tragic consequences.

Tragic consequences will often lead to deep discouragement.

Deep discouragement can cause you to make more bad decisions.

In all of this we see a downward spiral.

I. The Main Event – Strange Fire (vs. 1 – 7)

The Bible tells us that the two sons of Aaron, "offered strange fire before the Lord." God had given them His procedure for their daily task of offering incense in the Tabernacle. They were to take coals from off of the Brazen Altar, located outside of the Tabernacle, and put it in a censor along with some incense and they were to bring it into the Holy Place, but only at specified times.

"And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out."

(Leviticus 6:12-13)

"And he shall take a censor full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil:" (Leviticus 16:12)

While we cannot be exactly sure precisely what these two boys did, it looks like they used some coals of fire, other than those from off of the Brazen Altar, to light their censors of incense. It could also be that they offered their incense at a time other than the time specified by God:

"And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. Ye shall offer no

strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon." (Exodus 30:7-9)

It's also possible that two sons of Aaron went beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies, which was only supposed to be entered once per year on the Day of Atonement, and that only by the High Priest.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died; And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat." (Leviticus 16:1-2)

Whatever it was that they did, we know that they did something that was not according to God's exact instructions. By killing Nadab and Abihu God was setting an example to everybody involved in His ministry that they are to do things His way (Read verse three)

Illustrate – Uzzah; Ananias and Sapphira

Before we leave this point, let's notice also that Aaron and his two remaining sons were not permitted to even mourn for Nadab and Abihu (vs. 4 – 7). They were apparently in the eighth day of the ceremonies surrounding the dedication of the Tabernacle and were commanded by God not to leave. Aaron's and Moses' cousins had to come and take the bodies away for burial.

II. The Motivating Cause (vs. 8 – 11)

While we cannot be absolutely certain, it would seem that drunkenness was the reason that Nadab and Abihu made a lapse of judgment. Why else would God put this prohibition against alcohol directly in the middle of this passage regarding the strange fire.

Notice two things regarding this prohibition:

Verse 10 – alcohol diminishes your judgment and ability to distinguish between the clean and the unclean; the holy and the unholy.

Verse 11 – it will hinder your ability to teach the Word of God.

Alcohol was strictly prohibited for priests in the Old Testament.

Alcohol is also prohibited for preachers of the gospel in the New Testament. Both Titus and Timothy state that the pastor is not to be "given to wine" (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).

There are so many warnings given regarding the consumption of alcohol in the Scripture:

The first mention of wine in the Bible is when Noah drank it and got drunk and was exposed naked in front of his son.

The third mention of wine in the Bible is when Lot got drunk and actually had sex with his daughters.

*"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."
(Proverbs 20:1)*

*"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."
(Proverbs 23:29-35)*

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;" (Ephesians 5:18)

The consumption of alcohol is clearly forbidden for those who handle the Word of God and minister to God's people; and it is not a good idea for anybody else either. It causes so much pain and anguish in families. It has been the cause of so many lapses of judgment – drunken people do stupid things; It causes countless deaths on our roads.

God's commandment to Aaron and his sons – no wine. My advice to you is to stay away from it as well.

III. More Bad Decisions (vs. 16 – 20)

According to Leviticus six, unless the blood of the sin offering was brought into the Holy Place as on the Day of Atonement, then part of any other sin offering was supposed to be eaten by the priests in the Tabernacle.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD: it is most holy. The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation. ... All the males among the priests shall eat thereof: it is most holy." (Leviticus 6:24-26, 29)

Aaron and his sons, apparently did not have any appetite for food, and because they were discouraged, they did not think that God would accept their heart attitude regarding the sin offering.

Conclusion

Here is what I think happened here:

Nadab and Abihu were drinking.

Their drinking caused a lack of judgment on their part and they got careless in their ministry and offered strange fire before the Lord.

This tragedy naturally led to discouragement, but Aaron and his other two sons were not permitted to mourn properly, as they were in the middle of this extended Tabernacle dedication ceremony.

Discouragement then leads to further infractions against what they were supposed to do, which could have led to more tragic consequences had God (and Moses) not decided let it go.

Here are the practical applications that we need to learn:

1. The consumption of alcohol often will cause you to have a lapse in your judgment.
2. A lapse of judgment can cause you to make bad decisions.
3. Bad decisions lead to tragic consequences.
4. Tragic consequences are very discouraging, and can often lead to a deeper depression.
5. Depression can lead to more bad decisions, which in turns worsens your situation.

It's a downward spiral.

What can you do?

If you are in a downward spiral, you have to:

1. Look Up - Pray and Stay in the Word of God
2. Get help up. Take somebody's hand who can pull you up.
3. Keep up - Keep doing what you know is right to do. The doing of right will help you to feel better, which will help to reverse the downward spiral.

Illustration – David encouraged himself in the Lord.