

May 3, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Lamps, Bread, and Blasphemy

Leviticus 24

1. Daily (verses 1-4)
2. Weekly (verses 5-9)
3. Blasphemy (verses 10-23)

For the past several years at Rock Valley Bible Church, our small groups have met together to share our lives with one another, and to pray with one another, and to study the Scriptures together. And as we have studied the Scriptures, we have focused our attention upon the passage that will be preached the following Sunday, whether I'm the one preaching, or anyone else.

Doing so has created a level of anticipation, as we think about what will be preached the following Sunday. There have been times when some of you have spoken to me after my message and said, "Yep, Steve, it looks like you got it right. That's exactly what we said in our small group this past week." And that's good.

Studying the upcoming passage has also helped to equip us in handling the Scriptures for ourselves. We aren't reviewing what was said. Rather, we are anticipating what will be said. And the answers, hopefully, come on Sunday morning through the preached word. And week after week, as we see how things match up with what is preached on Sunday morning, our confidence in handling the Scriptures has been increased. (Furthermore, it has helped be greatly with my own sermon preparation).

Now, the first question that we have asked ourselves in our small groups is this: "What's the big idea of the passage?" This helps us to think about the overall idea that the Biblical author is trying to convey. This question helps us to keep our focus upon the forest and not the trees.

Well, as we come to Leviticus 24 this morning, we encounter a problem in answering this first question, "What is the big idea of Leviticus 24?" The problem is that it's difficult to determine the one big idea of Leviticus 24.

The chapter nicely divides into three sections. The first comes in verses 1-4, which speaks about the daily bringing oil into the tabernacle to light the lampstand. The second comes in verses 5-9, which speaks about the weekly placing on the showbread in the tabernacle. The third comes in verses 10-23, which tells the story of the man who blasphemed against the LORD, and the consequences for doing so. There is nothing particularly difficult about these three sections. The difficulty comes in trying to discern an overall theme of the chapter.

It may just be that the first two sections are thematically attached to the previous chapter. It may just be that the third section stands on its own. Remember, when Moses first wrote Leviticus, he didn't write it in chapters and verses. These didn't come along until the 1200's, thousands of years after it was written. Perhaps a better chapter break might be after the first two sections, with the third chapter being on its own. Or, better yet, perhaps the first two sections should be their own chapter.

But, in the end, it doesn't much matter, as long as we capture the big idea of each section. The title of my message is, "Lamps, Bread, and Blasphemy." Three sections. Three words. But, let's look at the first section, verses 1-4.

Leviticus 24:1-4

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD regularly.

These verses talk about how to care for the lampstand that sits in the tabernacle. Back in Exodus 25, the Lord instructed Moses on how to build this lampstand. He said, ...

Exodus 25:31-33

"You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand.

And this lampstand was to be placed in the tabernacle. I remind you that the tabernacle was a tent-like structure that was placed in the camp. It had walls of plated gold with fabric draped over the top. This structure had two rooms: the holy place and the most holy place. The lampstand was to be placed in the holy place.

The high priest was to bring the oil to the lamp, so that it might "be kept burning regularly" (verse 2). The gold backdrop of the inside of the tabernacle was likely lit with the flames of burning olive oil. All that lit the inside of that room was these lamps. The walls were plated with gold that would have reflected a deep yellow hue.

And because this lampstand was the only source of light in this room, I believe that the priests would have kept these lamps burning all day, every day. Though there is some debate about that, as the text seems to indicate here that the light is to burn "from evening to morning," indicating the lamp is to be burning continuously during the nighttime hours.

Now, at this point, all sorts of application has been made. Application has been made as to the light. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12). He said, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). So, follow Jesus, some say, and you will have life!

Another application has been made about the light, that we are the light of the world. Jesus said this is the Sermon on the Mount. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Application has been made as to the oil, which often symbolizes the Holy Spirit. And as the oil burns in the tabernacle, so may the Holy Spirit burn in our hearts. Furthermore, the oil is pure oil. We must be pure like the oil. Application has been made as to how the light burns continually (verse 5). It never goes out. So also, is our access to God. It never goes out. We can always enter into God's presence.

These are all well and good. However, these points of application deal with mere symbolism of the objects in the tabernacle. However, I think that there is a more straightforward application for us this morning. It has to do with what God commanded in this passage. Look again at verse 2, what are the people of Israel commanded to do?

Leviticus 24:2

"Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

What are the people of Israel to do? Bring the oil. How often is this oil to be brought into the tabernacle? Daily. This is, in fact, my first point, ...

1. Daily (verses 1-4)

It was certainly easy enough for the priests to be able to secure enough olive oil to keep the lampstand burning. A few ounces burns for a long time. Think about a candle, it doesn't take too big a candle to burn all day. The priests could have easily provided the olive oil by themselves. If the priests didn't want to beat the olives into oil, they certainly could have paid somebody to provide the oil.

And yet, God gave the responsibility of providing the oil to the congregation at large. And they were to do this daily. I think that this is the point for us to apply this morning. When we walk with God, it should be a daily event. Do you remember Leviticus chapter 23 (from last week)? In that chapter, God described all of the feasts and festivals that the Jewish people were to celebrate each year.

Chapter 23 includes the spring feasts and the fall feasts. The spring feasts kick off with the celebration of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. The first Sunday after this is the feast of firstfruits. Then 50 days later, it's the feast of weeks, which we commonly call, "Pentecost."

The fall feasts all occur in the seventh month, beginning with the feast of trumpets, followed by the Day of Atonement, and then, the feast of booths. And the Jews would have been familiar to this rhythm of life. Come springtime, they celebrated Passover, Firstfruits, Weeks, and in the fall Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths.

Just like our celebrations in the winter months consist of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. And in the spring comes Easter. The summer begins with Memorial Day and ends with Labor Day. This was the rhythm of the Jewish life.

But, lest the people think that their walk with God consisted primarily of keeping the seasonal feasts and festivals, God gave them a responsibility. Come daily. Come daily to the tabernacle and provide the olive oil.

Note that this doesn't have any reference to the sin of Israel. This oil isn't a "sacrifice" to atone for sins. It's a daily reminder of walking with God. And so, I say to you all, by way of application, come daily to God! This is applicable to our nation. There are those whose religious exercises consist of Christmas and Easter. So much so that people have coined the term to describe such individuals as "Chreasters." That is, those who attend church services only on Christmas and Easter.

I was talking with a man recently who has been sharing Christ with a coworker over the past few years. This coworker thinks that his problems in life is that he isn't "going to church!" The man sees problems developing in his life, and he thinks it's because he isn't "going to church." Many people think this. "If I go to church things will get better. I just need to go to church."

Now, it's not that that's all wrong (especially as you shall see in my second point). But God doesn't want us to worship Him only on Sundays. The act of going to church isn't going to solve any problems in and of itself. No, God calls for us to walk with him every day! This was the great call to Israel in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In other words, love the LORD every day. Love the LORD all the day. We sang these words of Fanny Crosby this morning.

This is my story
This is my song
Praising my savior
All the day long!

Let God's Word be on your heart; think of it every day. Let God's Word be on your mouth; talk of it every day. Let God's Word be in your home; see it worked out every day.

How are you doing? Is Christ a daily reality in your life? Do you read His Word daily? Do you pray to Him all through the day? Is Christ affecting your choices throughout each day?

None of you really have any excuse. There are plenty of Bibles to be had (you can take home a pew Bible if you want). There are plenty of books to be read (we have a library stocked with books that will help you). There are multiple ways to get God's Word into your heart: radio, internet, podcasts, audiobooks, or more. It's not for lack of resources. It's for lack of heart.

And so, I encourage you to walk with God Daily (verses 1-4). But, I have a second point as well. It comes in verses 5-9. Walk with God ...

2. Weekly (verses 5-9)

I trust that you will see this application from the showbread. It goes along the same lines that I did with the lampstand. Let's read verses 5-9, ...

Leviticus 24:5-9

"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due."

Back in Exodus 25, God described how this table should be built.

Exodus 25:23-30

"You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a moulding of gold round it. And you shall make a rim round it a handbreadth wide, and a moulding of gold round the rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.

Now, when it came to placing this into the holy place, it was to be placed along the north side of the room. The lampstand on the left side of the room and the table was on the right side of the room. In front of the veil leading to the most holy place, we have the altar of incense (which isn't covered in our text this morning). Again, you can imagine the high priest entering the tabernacle and placing the bread on the table. According to Leviticus 24:6, they shall be set "in two piles, six in a pile."

The priest then would put "pure frankincense on each pile" (verse 7). This would be the "memorial portion" of the food offering (verse 8). The rest of it would be for the priests to eat (verse 9). This is called "the bread of the Presence." It is to be changed out every week, every Sabbath.

Leviticus 24:8

Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever.

Most likely, the twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. The garments of the priests contained twelve stones. These stones clearly represented the tribes of Israel as their names were on the stones (Exodus 28:21). These twelve loaves from the twelve tribes made it as if a part of them was there in the holy place.

Again, did you notice who provided this bread? Verse 8 says, "it is from the people of Israel." I take this to mean that the bread was provided

by the people for the priests. The priests didn't need to mix together the flour and oil to make the bread. Nor did they have to pay anyone to do this. The people made it and brought it to the priest, Weekly (verses 5-9)

Now, again, all sorts of applications have come from these verses. Most of them focused upon the bread. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

So, let's come to Jesus. He is the one who can take away our sins. He is the only who can truly satisfy. And His satisfaction is forever! Or, the application may come by way of our need for bread. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." And as the bread sits in the tabernacle daily, this is a reminder to pray for our most basic needs -- daily bread.

Now again, these applications are fine and good, but such applications could easily be made wherever "bread" is mentioned. So, I would rather have us focus this day upon the responsibilities of the people. As verse 8 says, this bread is "Every Sabbath ... from the people" (verse 8). It came from the tribes of Israel, every week. There's a shadow there of a weekly responsibility to come before the LORD in worship every week.

Certainly, this was alluded last week when we looked at the Sabbath in verse 3 (of chapter 23). It says there, ...

Leviticus 23:3

"For six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

Although the day was a day of rest, it still meant that the people of Israel were bringing the bread to the priests to put in the Holy Place. And this morning, I simply want to press you toward a weekly responsibility of walking with the LORD. Yes, it's daily, as putting oil in the lamps took place every day. And yet, it's also weekly, as the bread of the presence is changed every Sabbath day.

And for us, the application that I'm drawing this morning comes in relation to our corporate worship. Is Sunday worship a weekly rhythm in your life? Now, I know that I'm preaching to the choir here, because you are a faithful people, who gather with the saints each and every Sunday. I simply want to affirm that you are committed to a good thing. Gathering here week after week after week, singing God's praise, praying to the LORD, learning from God's word, and fellowshiping with God's people, has a profound impact upon your soul that you ought never to underestimate.

But there may be some others here who haven't made their Sundays a priority. Perhaps you are visiting with us this morning. Perhaps you aren't involved in church family some other place. And perhaps Sundays aren't such a priority for you. Please know that you are welcome here. We would love to have you.

But, to those of you who have made Rock Valley Bible Church your church home, and have made this a consistent place of worship, I remind you of the article that I included in the Weekly Word last week (my weekly email to the church). It was written by Joe Thorn and entitled, "Making the Most of Sunday." I trust that some of you read it, but I know that not all of you did. Now, I'm not going to read it all this morning, but only enough to give some highlights to capture the spirit of the article.

Thorn begins with these words, ...

Corporate worship on the Lord's day is precious to the people of God. We are invited to gather together for fellowship with God and one another through both word and sacrament, prayer and song. This gathering is perhaps the most beautiful, earthly picture we have of the church as we, of differing backgrounds and interests, unite together in Jesus Christ. Edmund Clowney put it so well when he wrote: "Above all, we must prize the blessing of corporate worship. The church of the Lord, gathered for worship, marks the pinnacle of our fellowship with the Lord and with one another. The church is the people of God, the new humanity, the beginning of the new creation, a colony of heaven... In corporate worship we experience the meaning of union with Christ." Yet, Sundays can be trying. We are busy and tired from a week of labor and activities. For those families with children just getting out the door on time can be a challenge--if not a battle! And when we finally sit down in church we are assaulted with distractions emerging from our own hearts and minds. I want to encourage you to make the most of corporate worship, not just this weekend, but every weekend. As we look forward to what God will do among us as we gather let's remember that there are three ways to get the most out of your Sundays with the church: prepare, participate, and reflect.

In preparing, he focuses his attention upon prayer, ...

Pray for yourself, and for the minister, that God would give him a mouth to speak, and you a heart to hear, as you both ought to do. All this, before you shall assemble for public worship.

In participating, he gives the following admonitions, ...

Get there early.
Hear the word with eagerness.
Sing with your heart to the Lord and to those present.
Pray with those who lead in prayer.
Follow the preacher.

Let the various parts of corporate worship draw you to our triune God.
Go as one who is sent.

In reflecting he shares, ...

Finally, when the assembly has been sent out, and you are alone or with family or friends, reflect on what was heralded and heard. Return to the word that was preached, discuss it with others, and ask God to continue working in you what he said that day. [\[1\]](#)

This is great counsel. It's the heart of my second point. Now, let's move on to my third point. We have Daily (verses 1-4), Weekly (verses 5-9), and now we come to ...

3. Blasphemy (verses 10-23)

Beginning in verse 10, we have a sobering story....

Leviticus 24:10-12

Now an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel. And the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought in the camp, and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name, and cursed. Then they brought him to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan. And they put him in custody, till the will of the LORD should be clear to them.

Two men were fighting with each other in the camp. One man cursed another, invoking God's name. This was unusual. It was unusual because people didn't normally speak this way. In this day and age, it is unfortunately more commonplace to hear God's name taken in vain. Then, it was very uncommon. And because this was unusual, they took him into custody and brought him to Moses.

Another issue that made this unusual was the fact that this man wasn't a full Jew. His father was Egyptian. His mother was an Israelite. Surely they met when Israel was in Egypt as slaves. Perhaps she left Egypt with the boy, but not her husband.

And my guess is that he had learned the ways of his father, who had no regard for the LORD or His ways. And so, what this man heard his father utter, he repeated.

This is often the case when God is not in the home. The children learn from the sins of their parents. You show me godless parents, who speak with profanity, and I'll show you children who speak in the same way. The fact that this man's father wasn't an Israelite, made the situation a bit more dicey. Here's the question: Can we hold a foreigner, who, perhaps, doesn't know the ways of God, accountable for breaking the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

So, Moses sought the will of the LORD. And here's what God said, ...

Leviticus 24:13-16

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

In other words, it matters not whether the man is a sojourner or a native. If you blaspheme the name of God, you shall be put to death. No excuses. No second chances. You blaspheme God's name, and you are worthy of death.

The principle here is the principle of *lex talionis*, which is Latin for the "law of retaliation." In other words, "The punishment shall fit the crime." This is what God lays out beginning in verse 17.

Leviticus 24:17-22

"Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death. You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God."

Certainly, you have heard this before. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." We read Jesus' words regarding this in Matthew 5, ...

Matthew 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who

begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

This is true regarding our personal attitudes and perspectives. We ought to deal this way with others, not constantly demanding our rights. However, Jesus wasn't speaking to civil responsibility. There is a place for the civil authorities (Romans 13). Evil should be punished. Good should be rewarded.

More or less, our judicial system is based upon this principle. Rightly so. If you steal a gum ball, you shouldn't be punished as much as the one stealing a car. If you have a fender bender, you should not pay as much as if you set fire to someone's business. It is the job of judges to try to weigh the crime and the appropriate punishment.

Certainly, it's a hard task. What about the one who can't pay back what he stole? What about the one who can't afford an animal to replace the one he killed? What about an accident? What about the eye that gets poked out? Is there a financial equivalent to an eye?

And then comes the death penalty. Clearly, the LORD says that such a one should be put to death. "Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 24:17). "Whoever kills a person shall be put to death" (Leviticus 24:21).

Yet, today, in our day and age, it's often life in prison, because it's hard to put someone to death. There's a finality about it. What if you are wrong? Surely, there have been those who have been put to death for a murder they did not commit. Yet, in the case of the blasphemer, the sentence was executed: death.

Leviticus 24:23

So Moses spoke to the people of Israel, and they brought out of the camp the one who had cursed and stoned him with stones. Thus the people of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Here's what I want for you to grasp this morning. Blasphemy is worthy of death. Did you catch that? Blasphemy is worthy of death. So, what does that say about the crime? The crime of blasphemy is just as bad as murder.

Too often, we are soft with sin. We justify it. We don't think that it's so bad. Especially when it comes to cursing. Some people curse like they breathe. If only they would see what their sins deserve!

You use the name of the LORD in vain like this man did in Leviticus 24, and you should be placed on death row. Now, of course, we don't do this today, because, quite frankly, few of us would be alive today if this were the case. So widespread is this sin.

Perhaps this will give you an insight into the rage of the Pharisees against Jesus when they accused Him of blasphemy. They sought to put Him to death. We might look at them as fanatics. But, they understood the severity of the sin of blasphemy. God is so holy that to speak anything against Him is a capital crime.

This past week, I was in a discussion with several men from this church, as we were discussing the doctrine of eternal punishment. That doctrine is difficult to swallow. How can God punish someone for eternity? Daily torture. Forever. Left to our own logic, we would never believe such a thing.

And yet, the Scriptures are very clear. There is no doubt that there is a lake of fire that burns forever, into which will be cast all who failed to trust in Jesus. Jesus said that in this place, there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13, 24:51). Jesus described the anguish of the place as so bad that a man longed for someone to dip a finger in water and place it on his tongue (Luke 16). Jesus said, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). And just as eternal is the life we will enjoy with Jesus, so eternal is the punishment that others will experience apart from Jesus.

But, it's hard to believe such things. Can the punishment really be that bad? Won't God simply annihilate them? Won't God's love win in the end? The Scriptures won't have it. **Our fundamental problem is that we don't really see sin for what sin is! Like in this case: "Blasphemy is worthy of death."**

In fact, death is the end of all sin. Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." All of us stand guilty. We all deserve to die! But, Romans 6:23 continues with the good news. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus is our only hope! Believe in Him!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 3, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Joe Thorn, <http://www.christwardcollective.org/christward/making-the-most-of-sunday>.