THE GRAIN OFFERING

Leviticus 2:1-16

Key Verse: 1

“When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it.”

Thank God for revealing the truth about the burnt offering. The offering of the bull or sheep or goat was to be slaughtered, skinned and cut into pieces with the inner parts and legs washed. All of it, including the head and the fat, was to be put on burning wood on the altar and burned. It was a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. First of all, we are to know that Christ Jesus as the burnt offering was entirely sacrificed, his body being totally broken and his whole blood shed on the cross. It was to make atonement for us sinners so that we might become acceptable to God. This indicates the love of God who made his Son the burnt offering. In the grace of the Lord Christ Jesus and the love of God, we are to fight against sin in and around us fiercely, offering our bodies as living sacrifices, as instruments of righteousness. May we especially worship God with life-giving spirit.

Leviticus chapter 2 is about the grain offering. This grain offering was to be offered to the LORD, after the atonement for sin was made. It was usually offered together with the burnt offering. It was to express thanks to the LORD and so grow mature in God. This grain offering also excellently reveals the life of Christ and so the pattern of Christian life for us to follow.

Verse 1 says, “When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD…”. Here, “someone” is in Hebrew *nephesh,* used in Genesis 2:7, translated into “living being”, before the fallen state, while “any of you” in 1: 2, is in Hebrew *adam*. So this offering is for those who have made atonement for their sins through the burnt offering, those who haven saved through such a sacrifice. We are remined of 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”

Verse 1 continues, “…his offering is to be of fine flour…” Every grain offering is to be made of fine flour (1, 2, 4, 5, 7), except the grain offering of the firstfruit. We all know the process of obtaining fine flour. It is through winnowing, sifting and grinding. Through the winnowing, the chaff is blown away and removed. Through the sifting by the sieve, coarser grains are separated. And through the repeated grinding in between the upper and lower stone, fine flour is produced. How precious fine flour is! How fitting and pleasing to the LORD it will be when the heart of the offeror/the worshiper is like fine flour! God expects from us a fine flour-like heart. Jesus once said in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest! Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” A humble and obedient character was not natural even to Jesus. Hebrews 5:8 says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suff,ered.” We remember Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane, “Not my will but yours be done.” Luke further described it this way, “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat like drops of blood falling to the ground.” Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane was fit to that place of Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, where olive oil was squeezed and produced. The author of Hebrews says, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (5:7). Apostle Paul was so moved by the humbleness of Christ Jesus that he wrote in Philippians 2:6-8, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

A humble and obedient heart is not natural to any human being, since it was not natural even to Jesus. It is the product of God’s training through sufferings in life. This is clearly shown throughout the Bible and in the history of God. Joseph was a prince-like son, yet a spoiled youngie. But through the process of being sold as a slave, false accusation, and prion life for 13 years, his faith in the sovereign God was formed. In any and every situation, to him the subject was God, not people, confessing that God did it: God sent him to Egypt, not that his brothers sold him (Ge 45:7); God put him in prison for a purpose. He testified to God before Pharaoh when he was brought to Pharaoh and before he entered the service of the king. His last words to his brothers were, “You intended to harm me, but God intended if for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Ge 5:20). Moses once said to the LORD in his difficulty of serving the Israelites, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on earth to their forefathers?” (Num 11:11-12). He raised five consecutive questions. Yes, according to Hebrews 11:25, Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than the comfortable and convenient life in this world, and he must have chosen again and again to suffer with his people. And Numbers 12:3 says, “(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)”

We should always remember the case of Saul and of David. God made Saul the first king of Israel. At the beginning he seemed to be humble, hiding himself among the baggage when he was about to take the kingship (1 Sam 10:22-23). He was once so powerful, when the Spirit of God came upon him, that he mustered up more than three hundred thousand of Israelites quickly and defeated the Ammonites who had threatened the people of Jabesh Gilead of gouging out the right eye of every one. But he was ultimately disobedient to God. God sent him on a mission to totally destroy the Amalekites, not sparing anything. But Saul spared the king Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle—everything that was good. When Samuel pointed out his sin of disobedience, he replied, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.” (1 Sam 15:15). Saul tried to insist that he did obey the LORD, even saying that they did so in order to sacrifice the good stuff to the LORD. He obeyed in his own way, which was his disobedience. Finally, Saul confessed, “I have sinned”, but his life remained the same. God gave him chances to repent time and again, but he did not truly repent. He spent many years of his life only to kill David out of jealousy against God’s will. His relationship with God was broken. In an urgent situation, he inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him (1 Sam 28:6). Then he turned to a woman who was a medium only to find out the miserable end of his life, his death in a war. While Saul rejected God’s training, David humbly received all the trainings of God. Saul pursued to kill him for 13 years. David felt that he was like a dead dog. Yet he feared God. He had an opportunity to kill Saul two times. While David was far back in a cave, Saul came in to relive himself. David’s men said that it was the day the LORD gave David’s enemy into his hand. But what David did was to cut off a corner of Sauls’ robe unnoticed. Even in that he was conscience-stricken. With such an opportunity, he did not raise his hand against Saul, because Saul was the LORD’s anointed (1 Sam 24:4-7). Another time Saul and his guard were sleeping, and David and Abishai came to that place. Abishai said to David, “Let me pin him to the ground with one trust of my spear. I won’t strike him twice. But David said to him, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?” (1 Sam 26:9) David bore God’s humble training continually, once repenting of his sin of adultery and murder. He endured the training to the end even after he became king of Israel. His son Absalom rebelled against him and wanted to take the kingdom. David and all the king’s officials had to flee. In that difficult time, a man Shimei, pelted them with stones, cursing David, although all the troops and the special guard were on David’s right and left. They wanted to cut off the head of Shimei right away. Yet, David’s responded, “If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who can aske, ‘Why do you do this?’” (2 Sam 16:10). At the end of his life he sang to the LORD, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuse, my shield and the horn of my salvation” (2 Sam 22:1-3).

When everything goes well, we don’t know whether one’s faith is true. But through the time of sufferings, one’s faith is tested. This is the reason God led Israelites in the desert for forty years, to humble them and test them in order to know what was in their hearts, whether or not you would keep his commands” (Dt 8:2). And as we studied in Judges, God left the powerful enemy nations to the descendants of the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD’s commands (Jdg. 3:3-4). It is as we studied in 1 Peter 2, God wants us to know that we are living stones fit to the house of God’s people of the priesthood, not natural stones which are useless. For this God wants us to come to Jesus, the Living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him (1 Pe 2:2-5). We can have many problems living in this world, financial problem, health issue, raising children issue, marriage problem, relationship matter, etc. Certainly, God has his divine purpose in all those things that all our sinfulness be grinded again and again. May we not just try to avoid such hard times in life but learn obedience to his word in those times, especially to seek his kingdom first at any circumstances so that our hearts be like fine flour, humble and obedient before him.

God says continually in verses 1 and 2, “…He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron’s sons the priest.” In this passage, the word “oil” is written 9 times. The expression is “mixed with oil” (4), “spread with oil” (4) and “Pour with oil on it” (1, 6), and “put oil” (15). In the Bible, oil stands for joy. Isaiah 61:3 says, “…to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Proverbs 27:9 says, “Oil and perfume bring joy to the heart/make the heart glad…” There were times when the grain offering was not made without oil. It is when a husband doubts the love of his wife. Numbers 5:15 says, “He must not pour oil on it or frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of reminder, a reminder of wrongdoing” (NASB).

And in the Old Testament, kings and prophets and priests were anointed with oil. Apostle John talks about the anointing of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 2:20, “But you have anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. Apostle Peter said in Acts 10:38, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power…” According to Matthew 1:18, 20, the baby Jesus was conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit. At the time of Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove (Lk 3:22). Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit in doing the work of God (Lk 4:1, 14; 10:21). Evil spirits fell down before him and became powerless (Mk 3:11). Even those who touched the edge of his cloak were healed (Mk 6:56). While on earth Jesus and the Holy Spirit could not be separated but were one as Jesus the Son and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:8). May we keep our key verse of Acts 1:8 and really be powerful witnesses of Jesus as the fulfillment of our Lord Jesus’ last word and will before his ascension for us.

The incense/frankincense was very expensive. In the tabernacle was the altar of incense and the fragrant incense was to burn regularly before the LORD (Ex 30:8). Incense was always offered to God. It was a fragrance that rose to God. At the time of Jesus’ birth the Magi presented the baby Jesus with gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh (Mt 2:11). For Jesus’ burial Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes related to fragrance. (Jn 19:39). After Jesus’ burial some women brought spices/perfume to anoint Jesus’ body (Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1). It seems that the fragrance of such incense/spices/perfume would overrule the smell of the dead body. Indeed. Jesus rose again from the dead. Paul spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ as the aroma of Christ to God. To those who are saved he was the fragrant of life (2 Cor 2:14-15). So here, incense/frankincense may refer to resurrection.

God says more in verse 2, “The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” A memorial is to remember someone or certain things. It is a beautiful word. Here ,it is a memorial to the LORD. This expression is written 3 times in this passage. Verse 9 says, “He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” And verse 16 says, “The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the LORD by fire.” In this world, nothing is remembered but forgotten as time passes by. And Ecclesiastes 1:11 says, “There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.” It is a sorrowful thing that no one remembers me. So there is a flower named “forget-me-not.” On a wall of the Hart House at U of T, the names of soldiers who died in World War II are written. And on the benches, the names of the doners are written. Some names of streets are after the names of people. These all express people’s desire to be remembered. It can be a good thing. Yet, how wonderful it is to be remembered by God. That is to be remembered forever. Amid the flood judgment, God remembered Noah in the ark and let him come out of the ark after one year and ten days (Ge 8:1, 14-15). A criminal hanging on a cross said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). Amazingly, this prayer was answered. Most importantly, the life of Jesus must be remembered by all people, his whole life, from birth to death, resurrection and ascension. As we thought of, the words fine flour, oil and incense well represent the life of Jesus. Jesus said of his life in John 12:24, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” This was Jesus’ answer to the question of philosophical Greeks who were interested in concepts and ideas of life. It is written in Acts 17:21, “(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)” Jesus taught them the life of self-denial as his life was the life of self-denial and obedience to God through his death on the cross. Jesus continually said to them, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:14 that in the last days people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” May we fight against self-love cutting into pieces and follow and imitate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world so that our life can be remembered by God, though forgotten by the people of the world.

Verse 3 says, “The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.” Here we are reminded of Jesus, who is the bread of life. God wants us to really feed on Jesus and overcome the bread problem, fully trusting in God and believing all his provision in his way.

In verses 1-4, the grain offering is uncooked. In verses 4-10, the grain offering is cooked, baked in an oven, prepared on a griddle, or cooked in a pan. This grain offering seems to be related to the poor who did not have incense, which was expensive. Ovens at that time looked like a tomb, so probably being baked in an oven symbolizing Jesus’ burial, prepared on a griddle referring to the sufferings of Christ, and cooked in a pan, fully given to God. In verses 14-16, it is the grain offering of firstfruits, offering crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire.

In verses 11-13 is the description about what must be not put in the grain offering, and what must be put. Verse 11 says, “Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire.” We are to know the origin of eating unleavened bread. Exodus 12:11 says, “This is how are to eat it; with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.” And Exodus 12:39 says, “With dough they had brought from Egypt, they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.” It is also written in Deuteronomy 16:3, “Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all he days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.” Yeast refers to sin or corruption or bad influence. In the Dead Sea, there is no fish for the water is still/unmoving, but the Sea of Galilee is full of fish, for the water is flowing, steadily flowing. In a life of idleness, just relaxing and being comfortable, corruption begins. Our life in Christ includes being alert and vigilant. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 16:11, “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” meaning against their teachings. We should really watch out for all the humanistic teachings and distorted Christianity, guarding the sound doctrine of the gospel, the good deposit that has been entrusted to us (1 Tim 1:10-11, 6:20), guarding it with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14). Honey obviously refers to the pleasures of the world, appealing to our sensual desires and sweeping the whole world.

Verse 13 says, “Season all your grain offering with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offering; add salt to all your offerings.” Salt is emblematic of permanence or loyalty to the covenant, unchanging covenant of God. The people of God are his covenant people, particularly the people of the new covenant in Christ. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13). Salt is melted and functions as a preservative keeping saltiness and thus giving good influence, while yeast gives bad influence. Jeus also said in Mark 9:50, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” May we have Jesus and God’s words of promise in our lives and conversation.

Thank God for his precious words about the grain offering. Thank God for the wonderful life of our Lord Jesus Christ, the life of fine flour, oil and incense, and so truly memorable to God. May we, through all hardships in life, be grinded to be like fine flour and live a life that is memorable to God, watching out for yeast and honey, and keeping the salt.