

Offerings of God

(Offertory Notes) By Warren Zehring, Last Day of Unleavened Bread 4/29/2016

This is the Offertory message on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. We begin with a very fundamental story taken from the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus was sitting in the temple near where the **offerings** were placed, watching people put in their **offerings to God**.

Luke 21:1 And [Jesus] looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

Luke 21:2 And he saw also a certain poor widow casting into the **offering treasury** – two mites.

Luke 21:3 And He said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than the rich men:

The title of today's offertory comes from verse 4:

Luke 21:4 For all these rich men have of their abundance cast in unto the **offerings of God**: but she of her poverty hath cast in all the living that she had.

So, Jesus commended the poor widow to His disciples. The rich men gave what they could easily afford and didn't need. But the poor widow gave everything she had left to live on. The widow took her responsibility to God very seriously.

We are a small people in a large world. We may be a "widow's mite" sized group, but God looks on the heart – that is what really matters to God?

I want to begin by making the point from the Scriptures that all of God's People, all True Christians, are a part of God's **priesthood** of believers. We need to think of ourselves in that way. ...Being of that priesthood helps us to define who we are. Peter says to us:

1Peter 2:9 You are a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a special possession of God; that ye should show forth the praises of Him [demonstrate the goodness of God] who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

Revelation 1:6 [Jesus] hath **made us** kings and **priests** unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Why are we Christians referred to as a **priesthood**? Isn't that's an Old Testament term? Peter was paraphrasing the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 7:6 For thou art an **holy people** unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

God had entered a covenant making Israel a holy people unto the LORD – a royal **priesthood**, an holy nation. Peter quotes the Old Testament – showing that that special relationship extends even more so to the spiritual New Testament Church of God brethren.

In this offertory message, I am not referring to the Old Testament sacrifices so much as to the **free-will offerings** given to God. The offertory service is not an old meaningless rite or ceremony, but carries the meaning of a deeply serious **spiritual offering to God**.

God instituted offerings from the very beginning with Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel.

Genesis 4:4-5 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering [both]: but the Lord did not have respect unto Cain's offering.

We ask ourselves - "Why are some offerings respected by God, while others are not respected?"

Those **offerings** that are accepted by God are from the **heart**.

They are given from the **substance** of the giver of the offering.

They are presented and offered with **solemnity to God**.

2Corinthians 9:7 Every man gives according as he purposes **in his heart**, not grudgingly or by compulsion.

They are offered with hope, thankfulness, and true worship of the Lord. On each High Day we have the opportunity to **offer to God** in a new and more glorious way; effectually; with purpose; spiritually guided, and motivated.

I know of one group of God's true Christians who – after they have passed the offering basket around – they present the offerings in a prominent position – and then pray a prayer of thanksgiving, asking God to accept their offering – noting the heartfelt attitude of each of the participants.

I think that is a beautiful ceremony that focuses on the fact that the offering is going **to God**. A good point to make right here is that we should never give an offering – without a **prayer** attached to it.

God's intent was that all the people of Old Israel be a holy priesthood.

Exodus 19:6 And [all Israel] shall be unto me a **kingdom of priests**, and an holy nation.

But, God Himself established the **formal priesthood** in Aaron, Moses' brother, for a Godly purpose. They were the Levites who performed the Temple service. One of the primary functions of the priesthood is to **bring offerings** to God.

Hebrews 8:3-4 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: ... the priests **offer** gifts according to the law:

Their offerings were the highlight – the main feature of Israel's worship service at the Temple. It was a spectacle of magnificent proportion.

Remember, the Old Testament **priesthood** served as a picture or "type" of the coming ministry of Jesus Christ.

1Corinthians 10:11 All of those things happened for our example:

All those examples that we see in the Old Testament are shadows or examples that point ultimately to the reality – the fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Absolutely everything was very well orchestrated in the Temple service – with the purpose of directing each of the elements to produce the desired effect – giving glory to God.

The Old Testament priests got up early and washed and groomed themselves in a very demanding and fastidious manner. They dressed themselves in splendid ceremonial robes – used only for this sacred and very auspicious occasion.

And the High Priest – like Aaron, Moses' brother – excelled them all in every way – because he was anointed, and a type of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. The High Priest served the altar with great honor, with the authority to do so.

As a clarification here - I wish to focus today on the freewill **offerings** and not the animal sacrifices: God did not command animal sacrifices when the Old Covenant was made with Israel. The animal sacrifices were added to the Old Covenant later, because of Israel's transgression, (Galatians 3:19). The sacrifices were a continual reminder of sin, (Hebrews 10:3). It is true that we no longer offer slain animals as under the old covenant.

Hebrews 10:10 ...We are sanctified through the **offering** of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

As we very well know, the New Covenant does not perpetuate the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant because Jesus became the ultimate **offering** for sin. We are told in Deuteronomy 12:6 to bring forth your **freewill offerings** – that is what we are focusing on today.

When Jesus was in His public ministry, the office of the **priesthood** at Jerusalem had become terribly profaned and politicized. Most of the New Testament references to the priests are very negative. The priesthood was very corrupt. We tend to lump those priests in with the publicans and the Pharisees – they even sought the life of Christ.

There were ample bad examples like the High Priest, Caiaphas, a Sadducee, whose office was riddled with nepotism, who had a palace with maids and servants. He had become a powerful political force to be reckoned with.

Let's just concentrate on the office of the priesthood **as God designed it** to be. Some of the priests in Jesus Day tried hard to be good priests.

Acts 6:7 The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the **priests** were obedient to the faith.

The next point I wish to make is that the Scriptures are abundantly clear that Jesus is the ultimate High Priest.

Hebrews 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and **High Priest** of our profession, Christ Jesus;

Hebrews 4:14 ...We have a great **high priest**, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

Why does Jesus hold the office of High Priest? We will see that it has to do with what He had to **offer**.

As **High Priest** – what was the **supreme offering** that Jesus presented to His Father?

Ephesians 5:2 ... Christ also hath loved us, and hath **given Himself** for us an **offering** and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.

Let's review:

*First, we've seen that **offerings** to God were instituted from the very beginning:

*Then, we saw that a big part of the Old Testament Priesthood's service was to bring **offerings** to God:

*We've seen that Jesus is the ultimate High Priest who **offered** Himself to God the Father:

*And we've seen that we, brethren, are a royal priesthood also – who are to present **offerings** to God: Where and how do we go about it? God is painting a picture for the Church brethren of today. God has chosen Christians "to **offer up** spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1Peter 2:5 Ye [brethren] also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house [Temple], an holy **priesthood**, to **offer up spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

As we have seen so many times, we must be living sacrifices of laying our lives down to help each other into the Kingdom of God (Romans 12:1). But how does a Holy Day offering become a spiritual sacrifice (1Peter 2:5)? The answer has to do with **how** we present our **offering** to God. Let's look at one of God's edicts that instruct us about our offerings.

Exodus 23:15 Thou shalt keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread: (That's this week.) You shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou came out from Egypt: and **none shall appear before me empty**:)

Some have said that that phrase means you give an offering wherever you attend services on that day. I've heard that many, many times. Actually, this phrase means a great deal more than that. We need to understand what God is telling us here.

*What is God teaching us by the **offertory** we present to Him on His Holy Days? Actually this phrase, “**none shall appear before me empty**” applies to **intent** more than monetary considerations of our offering.

We also find this phrase in:

Deut 16:16 ... “Three seasons” (spring, summer, fall ...Pentecost), the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord **empty**:

This word “**empty**” [Heb ‘*reyqam*’] carries a strong connotation of personal **involvement** as it has to do with our demeanor, mind-set and approach to our offering. When God says, “**none shall appear before me empty**,” it means:

Do not appear before God – **ineffectually**, or **casually**, or **haphazardly**, or **empty-headed**, or **thoughtless**.

It means: Do not keep the Holy Days – **undeservedly** or with a **blasé approach**.

Imagine if you could have been there to see the priests of the Old Testament presenting the **offerings** of the people to God.

Numbers 10:8 And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow [a symphony of] silver trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance forever throughout your generations.

Imagine the great fanfare and beautiful moving, imposing, and regal trumpet resonance...

Numbers 10:10 Also in the day of your gladness, and in your **solemn days** ...and over the sacrifices of your **peace offerings**; that they may be to you for a **memorial** before your God: I am the Lord your God.

When God says, “**none shall appear before me empty**,” it means:

Do not observe this Feast Day – **without a cause** – ho-hum, or with a shrug of resignation, or **emptily**.

That’s what “empty” means. It means that the congregation, the brethren, are much more than simply observers – they are to be **energetic** partakers. We are all to be **involved participants** in the **offering service**.

Brethren, when you present your offering – picture yourself approaching the throne of God and laying **your offering** at His feet.

Physically, it does not matter if someone mails an offering **early**, or waits until the Holy Day to write out his check – God looks on the heart.

But we do **pray** during this Offertory service, “Oh Lord, here is my offering from my heart and soul in true worship and grateful thanks to you – for everything... Oh Father, we follow in Christ’s steps – as He **offered** the perfect **offering** of Himself...”

Brethren, our offering is between us and God alone.

The Old Testament veil has been removed that separated the people from the Holy of Holies – God’s presence. True Christians have direct access to the throne of God through Jesus Christ our great High Priest.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore go boldly unto the throne of grace...

What a privilege it is to be able to access the very throne of God directly, and **present our offering** to Him.

Offertory Music

The Special **offertory** music will be: Nocturn opus 9 number 2 by Frederic Chopin.

As I listen to this piano piece I try to imagine the meaning of this day – the Last Day of Unleavened Bread – as delivered Israelite – stepping ashore on the far side of the Red Sea from Egypt – taking halting steps at first – then growing in confidence – and being led by Jesus Christ toward the Promised Land.

End: Offerings of God