

MAKING SPECIAL OCCASIONS SPECIAL

A Devotional Meditation on Vayikra (And He Called)

Leviticus 1:1-6:7; Isaiah 43:21-44:23;

Genesis 3:1-24; Psalm 51:1-19; John 4:21-24; Romans 12:1-2; Revelation 21:9-26

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My positive outlook on life developed from the loving home of my childhood. Our parents demonstrated their love for us in many ways, large and small. They did very well with things like parties and presents, but it was the daily interaction and the interest they showed in our lives that made the special occasions so, well, special.

The first of those special occasions I remember was my sixth birthday party. It was a circus, literally. My parents and sister filled the patio with decorations and games inspired by circus animals and clowns. I was dressed as the ringmaster, in a little coat and top hat. My appropriately decorated little red wagon was with me when I greeted my guests so they could deposit their gifts in it.



My 6th birthday party had a circus theme, with me as ringmaster in a red coat and top hat. (McCarn family photo, June 8, 1968.)

Mother knew I enjoyed the circus, so it really didn't matter whether she asked me about having a circus party, or suggested it knowing I would go along with the idea. The party turned out to be just what I wanted. That is, it was what I wanted at age 6. My preferences changed over the years, of course. When I was 16, I was more interested in gifts of good books, and in getting my driver's license as soon as possible. When I was 25, I still wanted books, but the subjects and authors had changed. By the time I reached the milestones of my 50th and 60th birthdays, the priority was no longer on gifts, but on celebrating with the people most important to me: my wife, children, and grandchildren, and our closest friends.

Now that I think about it, having those important people on hand has been a consistent feature of my most memorable birthdays. The kinds of gifts they bring, or whether they bring any gifts at all, isn't as important as having them there. That's because I value these people, and they value me. These are special people to me, not because they show up on special occasions, but because they have been there for the ordinary occasions – the daily interactions that forge relationships through the fire and water of good times and bad. Those relationships are the true gifts. The relationships inspire other gifts as we learn what pleases those whom we cherish.

Reflection on relationships helps me understand why our Creator continues to invite us into His Presence. Genuine relationship with the crown of His creation is what He has desired from the beginning. That's why He was calling for our first ancestors in the cool of the day long ago in the Garden, and why He was sorely disappointed when they hid themselves. We too easily interpret His words to our first mother and father, and to the serpent who deceived them, as pronouncements of wrathful judgment. If that were so, would He have let them live? Why would He have held out the promise of redemption and restoration if their error had angered Him to the point of wrath?

Actually, the Creator's words of judgment were a statement of plain fact: our ancestors could not remain in the Garden, nor in His holy Presence, because they had trespassed His instructions for keeping the Garden beautiful, and departed from their commission to make the whole earth like the Garden. Until they came to terms with their error and turned the desires of their hearts from what they wanted back to what the Creator wanted, they would not be able to fellowship with Him in the way they had before. If they could not fellowship with Him, they could not grow into the fullness of what He had created them to be: the expressions of Himself into His creation.

That's one way to look at the desire of our God to take a Bride who will rule and reign with Him. It's also a good way to approach the seriousness of our separation from Him. If we don't become what He intended, then His creation remains incomplete, and He Himself is denied what He most desires. Because death is involved in our separation from Him, we must have a means of regaining life, and doing so in a way that removes the aroma of death forever. He teaches us about that through the protocols of His House. We call them sacrifices, administered through the hereditary Levitical priesthood, but they are more than that. The offerings for trespasses and sins graphically demonstrate the necessity of blood to cover our failings and make them right. In ancient days, the Temple service of daily sacrificial offerings looked forward to the atoning work of our Messiah. In days to come, when Messiah oversees the Temple service in His Kingdom, the sacrificial offerings will look back toward that same atoning work, reminding us of how we are granted entry into His Kingdom and restored to fellowship with our Creator.

There's a lot we do not understand about the Temple service. We consider the offerings of animals and grains on the holy altar as obsolete because of the work of Yeshua, but we overlook the fact that there will be a Temple in Messiah's Kingdom. That Temple will look forward to the day when heaven and earth are renewed, and our God dwells with us in the New Jerusalem. That's when there will be no further need of a Temple, an altar, and sacrifices. We don't need such reminders and teaching aids when we are fully restored to fellowship and have direct access to our Creator in the same way our first ancestors did. Until then, we are still in the redemption, restoration, and learning process.

Yeshua said the true worshippers of our Heavenly Father would worship Him in spirit and truth wherever they are, not exclusively in Jerusalem. His words, though, link to the worship centered around the altar and the Temple. It's there in the instructions of Moses about the offerings of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds:

The *kohen* [priest] is to offer it all, and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, made by fire—a soothing aroma to *ADONAI*.

Leviticus 1:13 TLV

The soothing aroma is the link to Yeshua's words: the aroma that floats into the air with the smoke of the offering. In Hebrew, the word for *aroma* has the same root as *ruach*, the word for spirit. Ruach also means breath, whether referring to the Holy Spirit of God, or the spirit He places into each human. Our Creator breathed His Spirit out to create us, and He breathes in the sweet aroma of our offerings, both the offerings made by fire on the altar, and the offerings of our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God.

That which is acceptable to Him involves proper protocol, which is why He went to all that trouble explaining the rules of His altar. However, protocol means nothing if the one making the offering is simply checking the box of meeting a spiritual obligation so that he or she may then walk away from the Creator and do as they please. King David explains the all-important first step:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.
For You would not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it,
nor be pleased by burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
In Your favor do good to Zion. Build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices and whole burnt offerings.
Then bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Psalm 51:16-19 TLV

This is the attitude that speaks of genuine relationship. It's not forged in the special occasions, but in the daily sacrifices of time, attention, and obedience. That's how we get to know the God Who already knows us inside and out. And that's how we make the special occasions with Him, well, special.