



**MT. ROSE REFORMED**  
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# A Living Sacrifice

*Reverend Scott Johnson | March 8, 2026 | Exodus 23:10-19*

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## Old Testament Reading

Our Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 23, verses 10 through 19. Exodus 23, 10 through 19, and this is the holy word of our Lord.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman and the alien may be refreshed. Pay attention to all that I've said to you and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.

Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib. For in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the feast of harvest, or the firstfruits, or of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the feast of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.

You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leaven or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

## **New Testament Reading**

Let's turn now to Romans chapter 12 for our New Testament reading. Romans 12 verses one and two. Romans 12, one and two.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

## **The Devotion of an Athlete**

If you watched any of the Winter Olympics that were on a few weeks ago, I'm sure that you couldn't help but being impressed by the talents and the skills of the athletes that were competing in their various events. Those athletes, they are truly the best of the best. But maybe the most impressive thing about those athletes is what we don't see, what isn't broadcast, and that is the hours and hours and hours of training each day that they put in for years and years on end.

If you're going to be an Olympic athlete, if you're going to be an athlete at that elite level, you must be extremely devoted to the training, the preparation that it takes to reach that level of success in any given sport. And that kind of devotion on the part of athletes to their sport is a picture in some ways of the sort of devotion that God calls you as a Christian to give or to devote yourself to God.

You are to devote yourself to Him in service, in worship, in obedience, not just a few hours each day, not just a few days each week, but every day, all the time, you are to give yourself, to consecrate yourself to serving the Lord, to worshiping Him, seeking Him, loving Him. And so Christ calls you not just to devote part of your life to Him, but you are to consecrate the entirety of your life to your Savior and Lord.

## **Consecration in the Old Testament Law**

This has always been the standard that God has set for his people. He has always demanded their wholehearted obedience, devotion, worship, their complete and unreserved consecration to Him. God wants all of us, not just part of us.

In these verses that we read from Exodus chapter 23, they give us a picture of the way in which the Lord called His Old Testament people, the people of Israel, to commit their lives to Him as their God and Savior. Again, as we are going through this section of Exodus, we are dealing with all kinds of various laws that the Lord gave to his people after he gave them the Ten Commandments. So we have seen various civil laws, judicial laws. These laws here mainly have to do with ceremonial duties on the part of the Israelites.

And as we look at these laws, one theme at least that we can use to tie these laws together—one common denominator that they have in common in our passage—is that they all, in one way or the other, they all call for the consecration of the people of God to the Lord. They call for their complete devotion to God. And so as we look at this passage this morning, we'll see how the Lord called his people to be devoted to him in these different ways. And then we'll see how Christ still speaks to us as Christians today through these laws and calling us to be completely devoted to him as our Lord and savior.

## **A Sabbath for the Land and People**

And so let's just go through these laws and we'll consider them somewhat briefly. In verses 10 and 11, the Lord commanded his people to give their land a rest every seventh year. And so they were to farm their lands for six years, but on the seventh year, they were to let their fields lie fallow. And they were to do the same with their vineyards and their olive orchards. And so this was a Sabbath for the land. This was a Sabbath rest for the land.

Just as the people of Israel were to rest one day each week, so the land also was to have a rest one year every seven years. And there could be, and no doubt there is, good agricultural reasons for doing this. If the fields lie fallow once every seven years, it gives them time to regain their fertility. But notice that in this passage, that's not the reason why the Lord gave the Israelites that they were to give their land rest every seven years. But it was so that through this lack of cultivating the land once every seven years that the poor may have something to eat. And not only the poor, but that even the beasts of the field may have something to eat.

And so this is one way in which God would provide for his people, particularly the poor among his people. And so if the Israelites, if they trusted in God's provision, if they trusted that the Lord would provide, even though they wouldn't go out and work their fields that year, they would give their land a Sabbath rest, and they would see how the Lord would provide for them, especially for the poor among them.

And in the same way, the Lord called on his people to trust him for his provision when he commanded them to rest one day of the week, one day in seven. And so in verse 12, we have what is essentially a restatement of the fourth commandment, which we considered several weeks ago. The people were not to work on the Sabbath day, and that was so not only they could rest from their labors, but also that their servants could rest from their work, their animals could rest from their labors as well, that they could be refreshed and strengthened.

As the Israelites were faithful to keep this Sabbath commandment, they also in this way testified to their faith, their trust that the Lord would provide for them, that he would give them all that they need. They did not need to devote themselves entirely all seven days of the week to secure what they needed to survive, but they trusted that God would provide for them even by taking a day off one day in seven during the week. And so the Lord called on his people in these ways to dedicate themselves to him. They were to dedicate their land to him. He commanded them to devote their time to him. And as they did so, the Israelites would bear witness to the truth that God was faithful to provide. He was their great provider.

## **Three Annual Feasts**

The Lord also called for the devotion of his people in observing the annual feasts that he had appointed for them. And that's what we read about in verses 14 through 17. Every year, the people of Israel were to travel to Jerusalem three times in the year and to celebrate these annual feasts that are described for us.

And the first feast was the feast of unleavened bread. For seven days after the day of Passover, the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread. And this was a celebration, a commemoration of that great salvation that the Lord worked for his people in bringing them out of Egypt, bringing them out from under their bondage to Pharaoh. Verse 15 says, you shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And they ate only

unleavened bread in order to commemorate the fact that when the Lord brought them out of Egypt, they left in such a hurry that their bread did not have time to rise. And so they would eat unleavened bread to remember how the Lord rescued them from Egypt. And so it was an annual reminder for them, this feast of the salvation that the Lord gave them.

And this was another reason why the Israelites were to devote themselves to the Lord. He was not only their provider, but he was their savior. And therefore, he deserved the worship of the people of Israel, of all the people of Israel. He says in verse 15, none shall appear before me empty handed.

The second feast was the Feast of Harvest. Elsewhere in the New Testament or the Old Testament rather, the Feast of Harvest is called the Feast of Weeks. It took place about two months after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the occasion of the Feast of Harvest was to celebrate the beginning at least of the harvest of grain that they were beginning to reap from their fields. And so this was a celebration again of God's provision. They brought the first fruits of their crops to the Lord as a way of offering.

Finally, the third feast was the Feast of Ingathering. This also has different names in the Old Testament. It's called the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. And this took place several months after the Feast of Harvest. This took place in the fall. And the occasion for the Feast of Ingathering was to celebrate the ingathering of all the different crops in Israel before the onset of winter. And so grain, olives and grapes, they had all been brought in from the fields. And so as they celebrated this feast at the end of all the harvests, they were giving praise to God for his provision again.

But this was also a feast to remember their salvation from Egypt. In Leviticus, we read that the Israelites during the feast of ingathering, that they were to live in tents or in booths for seven days. And this was to remind them of their salvation from Egypt because when they were delivered from the land of Egypt and in the wilderness, they lived in tabernacles or in booths.

And so the Lord commanded then his people to observe these three yearly times of feasting and worshiping. When you look at verse 17, it seems to suggest that only the male Israelites would participate in these festivals. But when we compare other verses from the Old Testament that we won't look at, it's apparent that it was normal, perhaps even expected, that whole families would join in as well in celebrating these festivals. And so these festivals were for the people of Israel in general; for them as a nation, as a people, they were to observe these times

of feasting and worshiping. And in this way, they would dedicate themselves to their God, to the Lord, who was both the one who provided for them, who cared for them, but he was also their redeemer, their savior.

## **Offering the Best to God**

When we look at the rest of these laws in this passage, again, the common theme running through them is the Israelites' devotion to the Lord. And it goes on to speak of their worship. In verse 18, we read that the Israelites were not to mix the blood of their sacrifice with anything leavened, and they were not to let the fat of the Lord's feast remain until the morning. The fat was the best part of the meat, and it was considered the best part of the meat in those days. I don't know if that's what you think the best part of the meat is, but it was to be given to the Lord. All the fat was to be burned up on the altar. So if the Israelites waited until the morning to burn up the fat on the altar, they were sinfully withholding from the Lord what belonged to Him. And so it was not to be put off until the morning.

Verse 19 says that the best of the first fruits of your ground, you shall bring it to the house of the Lord, your God. And so whenever the Israelites were to bring the first fruits of their crops to the Lord, they were to bring the very best of their crops, the very best of their first fruits, because it was God whom they were worshiping and he was deserving of their best.

When you go to the grocery store to buy fruits or vegetables, you look over what they have, and you pick over what's there, and you choose the best looking oranges or apples, and then you let the rest of the customers take whatever rejects that you left behind. Well, the Israelites, they were supposed to do something like that, only they were to pick out the very best of their produce, not for themselves, but for God. And so in that way, they were to devote what they had to the Lord.

Finally, there is in the second half of verse 19, a rather strange verse. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. This is one of those verses sometimes you read in the Old Testament, especially in these law sections that seem to come out of nowhere. There's no explanation attached to it. Just be sure you don't let your pastor see you boiling a goat in its mother's milk. There will be trouble.

But most likely, this verse is an expression of God's concern, even for animals. Again, people don't really know why this law is here. There's some guesses, and this is as good as a guess as any, but it would be a very cruel thing, a very perverse thing to take the milk of a mother, the mother of a young goat, the milk that is supposed to nourish and sustain the life of her offspring, to use that very milk to boil the flesh of her young. And so evidently this was a practice that needed to be forbidden, prohibited. And so the Lord prohibited the Israelites from doing this.

## **Consecration as a Way of Life**

In the middle of all these laws in verse 13, which comes in the middle of these laws, is kind of a summary of what the Lord is communicating to his people. And that is this: they were to be wholly consecrated to the Lord. They were not to pay attention to any other God or idol. Verse 13 says, pay attention to all that I have said to you. So the Israelites were commanded to obey everything that God had spoken to them. Make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.

And so when you consider these laws, especially when you consider them in addition to all of the other laws that we've already considered in the last few weeks, it's obvious that the law that God gave to his people, these various commandments, that they would impact every aspect of their lives. And so it was a reminder to them that they were not their own. They belong to the Lord.

And so their land—their land didn't belong to them to be used however they saw fit. It wasn't simply for them to make a profit, but they had to manage it according to the law of God. The Israelites were not free to schedule their time any way they wished, but they had to attend these annual feasts. They had to keep the Sabbath day, one day a week, holy for rest and worship. They certainly were not free in religious matters. They had to give themselves and worship in service to the Lord and only to the Lord. They could not mix the worship of the Lord with other gods, other idols, but they were to worship him according to his word as he commanded.

And so everything in the life of the Israelite—his time, his land, his wealth—it was all to be wholly consecrated to God. And they were to be wholly devoted to the Lord because of who he was, because he was the God who loved them, who cared for them, who provided for them, and who rescued them, who saved them from Egypt and from their bondage to Egypt and Pharaoh.

## **The Law as a Shadow of Christ**

In fact, when we read these laws in the light of the New Testament, we see it's evidence that the Lord was revealing to his people, the Israelites, that he was their savior, not just from their bondage to Pharaoh and Egypt. He was the one who provided for them, not just with what they needed for life in this world, but he revealed to them through these laws that the Lord was their savior from their bondage to a far greater enemy, that is their bondage to sin. And he was the one who had provided for them, not just what they needed for temporal life in this world, but the Lord was the one who provided what they needed for eternal life, for spiritual life.

And so the greatest blessings that God gave to his people in the old covenant, as well as the new, were not earthly blessings, temporal blessings, but they were spiritual, eternal. And so the land that the Lord would give the Israelites, that they were to farm a certain way, the land of Canaan, the land of promise, this land was just a shadow of the greater heavenly country that the Lord was preparing for his faithful people.

The Sabbath day, of course, it pointed back to their salvation from Egypt, but at the same time, it pointed ahead to the eternal Sabbath rest that God was preparing for his people. And insofar as these three annual feasts reminded the Israelites of their redemption from their bondage to Pharaoh, they also pointed the Israelites ahead to that greater salvation that the Lord was preparing for them, that he would accomplish for them through the Messiah, through the Christ, that is freedom from slavery to sin.

Insofar as these feasts were times to praise God for the provision of their daily bread, they would also be reminders to Israel that it was the Lord who not only provided their daily bread, their grain and wine and so on, but he also provided them spiritual bread. He provided them the spiritual sustenance of his word and promises. And so in Deuteronomy 8:3, the Lord declared to Israel that it was his will that they would know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And we can go on. The blood of the sacrifices of the Israelites, that they were not to mix with leaven. This was the blood that pointed them to the blood of that one perfect sacrifice that was to come that would take away their sin forever. And it is as we stand where we are after the coming of Christ, we can look back and we can see it was Jesus Christ. It was the Messiah who fulfilled all of these promises that were implied in these laws and in these feasts.

## **Christ the Fulfillment of the Feasts**

He is the true spiritual bread. Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. And just as the Passover lamb pointed to Christ, who is the lamb of God, who takes away the guilt of sin, so the leaven of the feast of unleavened bread pointed to the presence of sin in us, that we are to purge that sin, that we are to purge by the grace of God as the redeemed people of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

And again, we can go on and see how Christ fulfilled these laws and the promises implied in them. The Feast of Harvest was a day or the day that the New Testament calls Pentecost. And it was the day of Pentecost that the exalted Lord Jesus, that he poured out his spirit upon the church. And it was a celebration there, not just of the harvest from the fields, but it was the beginning of a far greater harvest, the harvest of redeemed people, redeemed by Christ, converted by the Spirit, brought into the kingdom—a great harvest of souls began on that day.

Also, just as the firstfruits of the Feast of Harvest were a sign of a greater harvest to come, so the Lord Jesus in His resurrection is called in 1 Corinthians the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. And so Jesus, as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, that points again ahead to a great spiritual harvest, the harvest of countless resurrected souls, resurrected saints who will come to new life at the return of Christ.

Verse 18 speaks of the blood of my sacrifice. All the blood of the sacrifices that the Israelites offered to the Lord pointed to the shed blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin and frees us from all guilt and condemnation. And so in one way or another, these laws and these feasts, they reveal to the Israelites the greater salvation that was to come with the coming of Christ, the greater provision of spiritual blessings, eternal blessings that God had in store for his people.

## **A Living Sacrifice**

And the salvation from bondage to sin and death, the gift of eternal life—these realities that these laws and these commandments pointed to and these festivals pointed to—these are now

yours in fullness by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As you come to Him by faith, as you hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, these promises are yours; your sins are forgiven. You have been freed from the bondage of sin. You have been freed from the bondage to sin and guilt and death forever. You have Jesus, the bread of life, who gives you eternal life, who sustains you in that life.

And so Jesus Christ is your great savior. He is your great provider. And for that reason, just as the Lord called the Israelites then to devote themselves, to give themselves in obedience and service and worship to the Lord who was their savior, so you are called to that same kind of complete, unreserved, wholehearted devotion and consecration to Jesus Christ because of the work of salvation that he has accomplished for you.

And that's what we read in the New Testament reading in Romans chapter 12. If you remember when we went through the book of Romans, the first 11 chapters of Romans, in Romans, Paul unpacks the gospel and all of its different aspects of that grace that God has given to us in Jesus Christ. And then beginning with chapter 12, verse one, Paul says this: he says, I appeal to you brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

As Christians, we are called to consecrate ourselves, our bodies, to the Lord in worship as a sacrifice. And your bodies here means all that you are. Body and soul, you are to offer to God as a sacrifice. And so unlike the Israelites, you don't bring to the Lord sacrifices of grain or of animals, but you bring to the Lord your body, your heart, your mind, your will, all that you have, all that you are, you bring to the Lord as a living sacrifice. That is the worship, the life to which God calls you as one whom he has redeemed from sin and death.

## **The Goal of Devotion**

At our men's fellowship meetings, we are working through a book by John Calvin, and John Calvin had a motto, and his motto was this—his personal motto: "My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely." And this should be the motto of every believer. My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely.

If someone saw your life, if someone examines the course of your life and was even able to examine your thoughts and your hearts, if he saw the priorities that you make, if he saw how

you spend your time, how you use your money, if he saw how you relate to others, how you think of others, if he saw the things that you think about, the things that you delight in and treasure—if he saw your life, would he be able to say, here's a life, here is the life of a person who is devoted to Christ, his savior. Here is the life of a person who has consecrated herself to her Lord, Jesus Christ.

The truth is none of us are as devoted to Jesus as wholly, as unreservedly as we should be. But we have the promise of God that by his spirit at work in us, by the word that he has given us, he will work in us to conform us more and more to the image of Jesus. He will make us more like that one man who gave himself, the one and only man who ever gave himself in complete, total, unreserved devotion to his God.

But the Spirit of God, as a believer, you have the Spirit of God abiding in you, living in you, working in you, to grow you to be more like Christ. None of us are there yet. But as God gives you the grace to trust in Him, as God gives you the grace to walk by faith, to serve and worship Him, He will make you more and more an instrument set apart and devoted to Him.

## **Faithful Waiting**

You may be familiar with the story of the famous Japanese dog named Hachiko. Hachiko was a dog in Japan, an Akita, if you're familiar with that breed. He lived in the 20s and 30s, the 1920s and 30s. His owner was a professor at the University of Tokyo. And every afternoon when Hachiko's owner got off at the train station on his way home from work, his dog Hachiko would be there waiting for him on the train platform. One day his owner didn't get off the train and that's because his owner died at work. He had a heart attack and died. And so Hachiko that day went home alone.

He showed up again the next day at the train station at the time that his master should have been getting off the train. But his master was not there to meet him. And so he went home again. And then he showed up the next day at the right time waiting for his master and he showed up for the next nine and a half years, every single day, waiting for his beloved master to get off the train. And he did that until the day he died.

It's a wonderful story of loyalty and devotion to a master. And it's an illustration in part of the kind of loyalty and devotion and steadfastness that Christ calls you and me to give to him. We are to

wait day by day for him. We are to look to him as our master and savior, even though we do not yet see him.

The good news is that unlike Hachiko's master, your master, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is coming back one day. He is not dead; he lives, and he has promised that he will return. And so you serve, you wait upon, you look to a living Savior and Lord who has promised that He is coming again to take you home to be with Him forever.

Until He comes, He sees your faithfulness to Him, and He promises that your labor for His sake is never in vain. And when He does return, He will say to those who have been faithful to wait for Him, to serve Him in His absence, He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Let's pray.