

Sin, uncleanness, holiness, atonement

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Well, good morning and welcome to this pre-recorded service for the 22nd of November 2020! for Calvary Church here in Brighton. We're in the middle of lockdown two, so we're meeting by YouTube and Zoom, but we are planning to start doing live stream and our hope and aspiration is to do something on the 13th of December in the evening as a sort of test and to build up from there.

So welcome to you if you're regular or if you're just dropping in. Those dropping in, my usual introduction to say we're an independent Baptist church in the seaside town of Brighton on the south coast of the UK. And my name's Philip Wells. I'm working full-time for the church as pastor elder.

And this morning we're going to be continuing our thinking about the New Testament letter, New Testament book called The Letter to the Hebrews. And this time we'll continue looking into the background of the letter by thinking about the Old Testament book that it refers to. That's the book of Leviticus. And obviously it refers to the whole of the Old Testament system, but the book of Leviticus is a pretty prime example of it. And this time we're going to think about what it says about sin and uncleanness and how you get rid of it, which we would call atonement. And you may say, well, this is completely irrelevant. Old Testament book, animal sacrifices, all that sort of stuff. But on the other hand, I doubt whether there is a single person on the planet who has never felt bad about what they've done or thought. That's consciousness of sin. And I doubt if there's anyone who doesn't at some point feel that their lives have been stained by something they've done or said or thought. And that corresponds to the idea of uncleanness. So you see, we do actually live day by day in a consciousness of guilt and sin and uncleanness. And here in the Bible is the answer. The world of science, whether it's the so-called hard sciences or the social sciences or whatever, or mysticism or any sort of healing, has actually very few deep answers to the issues of sin and its stain on human life. But the Bible actually has wonderful things to say about this and powerful things. So that's what we're going to be looking at. So don't be put off by the description, but stay tuned. So the plan of what we're going to do is up on the screen there at the top of the top of the screen. And as we come, in a moment we're going to sing something, but let's pray first of all. Almighty God, we come to you in the midst of the bind and weariness of this lockdown. We all find, to one degree or another, that this is wearing and unwelcome.

You are the God of hope, and we pray that at this time you will again show us something hopeful and uplifting. We remember that you sent this virus for a reason, and we pray that we might all be willing to learn all the lessons you want us to learn, as a human race, as a nation, as a church, and as individuals. There's not one of us for whom the issue of sin and stain is irrelevant.

So please show us all today your answer to these deep matters. And perhaps there is somebody watching for whom this is particularly relevant. Please show that person what you want them to learn, and send them away with sins forgiven and conscience cleansed, because they and we all have met with Jesus, the Redeemer, the one who gives eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. We ask in his name. Amen.

[4:22] Amen. So we're going to sing Psalm 98, which is a song of worship and praise, because God deserves worship and praise. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known. He has revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Burst into jubilant song with music. Make music to the Lord with the harp and the sound of singing. So very appropriate to sing this. We're coming up towards Christmas, when his salvation was revealed to all nations. Perhaps not in the way that people thought it would be, but in the shape of a baby born in Bethlehem. So we're going to sing Psalm 98, Sing to God new songs of worship. Sing to God new songs of worship. Sing to God new songs of worship.

Earth has seen his victory. Let the lands of earth be joyful. Praising him with thankfulness.

[6:37] Sound upon the harp his praises. Play to him with melody. Let the trumpet sound his triumph. Show your joy to God the King. Sing to God new songs of worship.

Let the sea now make a noise. All on earth and in the waters. Sound your praises to the Lord. Let the hills rejoice together. Let the rivers clap their hands. For with righteousness and justice he will come to judge the earth.

And having sung, sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvellous things. Let's now turn to the Lord in prayer. We're going to pray and let's do as we've been in the habit of doing.

I think it's a good habit, a good thing to do. We'll say out loud together the Lord's Prayer as we come to the end of the prayer which I shall lead. So let us pray.

[8:28] We praise you for your faithfulness to your promises. We praise you that you are a God who makes commitments and you keep those commitments. We thank you for your faithfulness to your particular people, Israel.

Israel and we thank you that in these last days you have extended that so widely to all the nations that all may come in. We thank you that the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. We thank you that the Lord. We thank you that the Lord. We thank you that these commitments and promises are embodied in Jesus Christ whom you sent at Christmas. We remember the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

And we pray that the Lord. And we pray that even now you would give us a sense of your triumph, your goodness and your joy. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

That we may detect and respond in joy to you and your salvation. We pray for our nation and we pray for the world.

[9:37] Have mercy upon us, O Lord. Please enable us to learn the lessons not only of this virus, but the lessons of your call to repentance, the lessons of the gospel.

We have been praying for relief and we pray that we may soon be able to meet together and that things will be back to normal. We thank you that you have been at work in the various scientists. And we thank you for the possibility of vaccines that in your common goodness will be available to men and women and boys and girls.

We pray that in a sense people will not just forget and not just feel that they've got into the clear by means of cleverness without hearts being touched with a change of attitude toward you.

We pray for ourselves. Deliver us, O Lord, from our sins, from our rebellion, from all our wrong desires and wrong inclinations at the deep level of heart and motive.

[10:45] Forgive us for our wrong behaviours of outward speech and deed. And revive and renew within us the work of your Spirit, who has put within us true desires to love you, to be grateful to you, to love our neighbour.

We particularly pray today for those of our fellowship who are in need. Some who are on their own and feel on their own.

Please may they feel that you are present with them. For those, Lord, in hospital or about to attend hospital, please be with them.

Those awaiting medical procedures, give them patience and make it possible for their conditions to be alleviated as soon as possible.

We pray, Lord, for all who are made low by various factors at the moment. We pray for a lifting of all our spirits through the love and kindness and promises of Jesus.

[11:48] We pray for these people as we pray for ourselves, that all of us would be conscious that you are the God who does not leave us nor forsake

us .

You are the God who works all things together for good. You are the God who is at work in your people to make them long for heaven and have their hearts set on things above where Christ is at the right hand of God.

So hear all our prayers, we ask, through Jesus Christ. Amen. And let us say together the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[12:53] For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. We're now going to read again from Hebrews.

And our Sema is going to read to us. You remember that this refers to the tabernacle. Tabernacle is just a long word which means tent. And God lived amongst his people in the Old Testament times. Well, he lived in the temple, but the precursor to the temple was the tent, the tabernacle. And the reading has some of the details of its construction. But it also references our subject for this morning, that matter of blood and cleansing and conscience.

And all these things that are so important. So thank you for reading to us, our Sema. Thank you. We're going to have read Hebrews chapter 9, verses 1 to 14.

Now, the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up in its first room where the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread.

[14:08] This was called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place, which had the golden altar of incense and the golden covered ark of the covenant.

This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the atonement cover.

But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priest entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.

But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The Holy Spirit was showing by this, that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed, as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

[15:21] This is an illustration of the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.

They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and most perfect tabernacle that is not man-made.

That is to say, it's not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood, having obtained external redemption.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of heifer, sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

[16:27] How much more then with the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciousness from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.

This is the word of the Lord. The fulfilment of all the rituals at the tabernacle, the sacrifices of animals and sprinkling of blood and all of that.

The fulfilment of it is the self-offering of Jesus, and in particular his death on the cross. So the next song we're going to sing, Beneath the Cross of Jesus, is about the cross.

A cross not meaning a piece of wood, so much as the whole act of his death and his self-offering, his work, which we would call an atoning work, making atonement, making God and man at one, and all these powerful implications.

So the song is Beneath the Cross of Jesus. Beneath the Cross of Jesus Beneath the Cross of Jesus Beneath the Cross of Jesus Beneath the cross of Jesus, my unworthy soul is one.

[18:27] Beneath the cross of Jesus, his family is my own. Once strangers chasing selfless dreams, now one through grace alone.

How could I now dishonor the ones that you have loved? Beneath the cross of Jesus, see the children called my God.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, depart before the crown.

We follow in his footsteps, where promised hope is found. How great the joy before us, to be his perfect bride.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, we will gladly live our lives. Now, Rosemary is kindly going to read to us from Leviticus, from this Old Testament book.

[20:03] And you will see a lot of regulations here about how sacrifices were to be conducted. Please have a look at the kind of misdeeds that are covered by the sacrifices.

There will be quite a list of them. And also notice the way that this refers to uncleanness and sin, and binds that together with the idea of the death of an animal, and its blood, and all these things. So, here's Rosemary going to read to us from Leviticus, chapter 4, verse 27. Thank you, Rosemary. Leviticus, chapter 4, verse 27, to chapter 5, verse 7.

If a member of the community sins unintentionally, and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, he is guilty. When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring, as his offering for the sin he committed, a female goat without defect.

He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.

[21:26] He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven. If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect.

He is to lay his hand on its head, and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.

He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire.

In this way the priest will make atonement for him, for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven. If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.

[22:48] Or if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean, whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals, or of unclean livestock, or of unclean creatures that move along the ground, even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean and is guilty.

Or if he touches human uncleanness, anything that would make him unclean, even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it, he will be guilty.

Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil, in any matter one might carelessly swear about, even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it, he will be guilty.

When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned, and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock, as a sin offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves, or two young pigeons, to the Lord as a penalty for his sin, one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering.

[24:11] Now the next song we're going to sing is this wonderful and moving song, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. And again, as a Christian meeting, well, Christian broadcast, we're going to see this from the

Christian point of view, which sees that there is a fulfilment of all the Leviticus stuff in the death of Jesus.

And once again, the word cross is used as shorthand for Christ's death and his work as he died, and his offering as he died. And this song says how much our lives ought to be overshadowed in awe and wonder and love at what Christ has done for us at a very personal level.

So, yeah, something really to take to heart. May the Lord enable us to take this to heart. And after we've sung this, we'll hand over to the talk.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross On which the Prince of Glory died Forbid it, Lord, That I should boast Saving the cross Of Christ my God The very things

That charm me most I sacrifice them To his blood See from his head His hands His feet Sorrow And love Flamingled down When did such love And sorrow meet For thorns For thorns Composed So rich A crown His life Blood-like Had crimson Rope

[27:18] Closed And soul is Body On the tree And I am dead To overflow And all the globe Is dead to me Where the whole realm Of nature That were an offering But too small But so amazing So divine So divine Demands My soul My life My hope God OK, well, let's come together to look at God's word and let's first pray that God will help us with this.

Lord, we've come to look into your word and we trust the promises that you have made, that it is in your word and through receiving your word that we meet you, that you act in our lives by your word and by your spirit.

So please honour those promises as we come in faith, asking that you would speak to us and change our lives and do things in us and for us and for your glory through your word just now.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to think about this matter of stain and the stained life.

The idea that our moral and spiritual failures do something to us that can be rightly described as staining. Sometimes we use the word sullied. I don't know whether we use that word very often, but the idea of a life being stained.

[29:40] Something that perhaps make us feel dirty. Quite often, I think, used to have sexual sins, but certainly not limited to that.

Going much wider. Staying by impure, unclean motives or speech or actions.

Now, if you don't know anything about that experience, then I really suggest you fast forward to the closing prayer. But I don't think there can be many people that don't have that experience.

The idea of a stain and needing a stain remover. And that's really what we're going to talk about this morning as God helps us. What human lives need and what we need is a spiritual stain remover.

So, we're in Hebrews. It's the letter with warnings. And I'll just repeat once again, in case you didn't get the idea, the past however many times, that there's a cliff edge and we're told to keep away from the cliff edge.

[30:53] A warning to Christians to keep on the path. And the many positive things in Hebrews about fixing our eyes on Jesus, having a great view of him, the great high priest, Jesus, the son of God.

Therefore, we can approach, we can approach the throne. We can approach the throne and find help in our time of need. And this whole matter of the intermediary between heaven and earth, as it were, the priest and the high priest.

And also the idea that Jesus does things better. Better. He's superior to and better than the things in the Levitical system, the old covenant.

The idea of being superior means of the same sort, but better. And that idea of the sort, or the same sort, the vision of the Levitical system being fulfilled, that's what I'd like to look at today.

And as I intimated earlier, we're backtracking to look into the Levitical system. And the particular part of it is this idea of being clean, unclean.

[32:05] And that's what the bit that I'd like us to look at. So we're going to have a stab at thinking about that part of the vision. I say have a stab because it's something I'm not particularly familiar with.

And I'm going to do my best to try and present it honestly and helpfully. In Hebrews we read, The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean.

Sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God?

That's Hebrews 9. And we're going to come back to that. And what was read to us in the Levitical world, if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean, whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals or unclean livestock or of unclean creatures that move along the ground, even though he's unaware of it, he has become unclean and is guilty.

Or if he touches human uncleanness or anything that would make him unclean, even though he's unaware of it, when he learns of it, he will be guilty. So this whole matter of cleanness and uncleanness is a feature of the Levitical world.

[33:29] The world of ceremonial states, we call them ceremonial, but in those days they wouldn't have said it's ceremonial, they would have said it's absolutely real and absolutely important.

This idea of being, in one of these states, unclean, clean or holy. And it's a bit of a sliding scale because certainly in terms of holiness there was holy and most holy.

So in my introduction earlier on, you could see that I'd hope to cover more, but when I actually come to work it all out, I'm afraid this will have to do because there's so much material, I can't quite cope with any more than this.

So let's look at this world of the unclean and the clean and the holy. And there's the priest standing in a set of circles, a set of spaces which are particularly holy or clean or unclean, as you get further from the centre.

And in the Levitical world, everything is labelled as unclean or clean or holy. Well, there's the thing to begin with, isn't it? It labels everything. And God implants and uses something quite human to teach, certainly his ancient people and us too, a vital spiritual lesson.

[34:55] So using this idea of clean and unclean, Adam and Eve's sin, well, I probably should say Adam's sin, but Eve was involved, but it was Adam's sin first and foremost, brought a change of state to the human family and brought distance because they were expelled from the garden and brought stain into the human condition and human experience.

And therefore, there is a relevance to this idea of needing cleansing, cleaning, cleansing. And the idea of clean and dirty is, I think it's embedded within us.

Certainly we teach children it from an early age and they get the idea. The idea of washing. So I think this is pretty much instinctive within it, isn't it? Wash your hands.

So we've now got to wash our hands every 20 seconds. No, actually, we wash our hands for 20 seconds and we sing happy birthday while we're doing it. Wash your feet.

Wash your hair. And when you're drinking, wash your cup. If you've been lying on the bed, after a while you say, well, you know, it's that time of year where we change the bedsheets.

[36:17] Or wash your clothes. All these things need washing and cleaning and we understand that. And we teach children, don't eat that, it's dirty.

So the little child picks up a worm. No, no, no, you don't eat that. It's yucky and dirty. Or there's a lovely sticky sweet found on the pavement. Oh, yes. No, no, no, no, you don't eat that.

It's dirty. So this idea, it's very instinctive, isn't it? It makes sense in human life. And just to try and make sense of it in the Levitical world, I'm going to use the analogy of a medical context.

So the next bit we move on to is a medical thing. So I've got a little grid there. And down the side is the real thing of holy, clean and unclean.

And then the next column down is a medical analogy. And the medical analogy would be somebody who is scrubbed and sterilised. And then going down, somebody who's in normal health.

[37:25] And then somebody who's got the lurgy, got flu, for example. And then there's three spaces going along left to right. Medical. Hospital car park.

Maybe visiting a new baby to see a new baby. And then third column, conducting an operation.

Now, if you've got flu, you would be OK in the hospital car park.

So there's a tick there. Visiting a new baby. No, no, no. Stay outside. Conducting an operation. No, I don't think anybody would thank you for conducting an operation if you've got flu.

So there's an analogy of, like, unclean. It's an analogy with our world. And there's a level. You can go up the levels there of clean.

Sorry, unclean, clean and holy. It's an order of ascent. So let's go to the next level. Clean. So clean, in this analogy, corresponds to somebody in normal health.

[38:28] Well, normal health, you can go into the hospital car park. Yeah, that's OK. And normal health, you could be a new dad and go and hold your little new baby.

That would be OK. But just being in normal health does not qualify you to say, oh, I fancy cutting somebody up today. I'd like to conduct an operation.

They'd say, no, no, no. Apart from the fact you don't know what you're doing. You're not clean enough. So there's another level of cleanness. And the final level, if you are suitably qualified, you would also need to be whatever medical people do.

And I'm sure I could be corrected on this. But you'd have to be scrubbed and sterilised and kitted out and wear the correct sterile clothing.

And then not only could you go into the hospital car park, that would be OK. Not only could you go and visit somebody who got a new baby, that would be OK. But you would be, from the point of view of cleanliness, able to conduct an operation.

[39:32] And these are like the gradations in the Levitical world. The hospital car park is like the outside world.

The new baby part is like being within the camp. And conducting an operation is like being in the holy place. So there's places that you can go according to the state that you're in.

And there it is. So I've made it into, I don't know whether you can see the cursor moving there. But outside the camp is the unclean place, like having flu.

Inside the camp is like being clean, like being in normal health. And going right into the holy space, the tabernacle, is like the state of holiness. And in the analogy, you'd have to be scrubbed and sterilised to do that.

Now, what about moving between the states? So moving, as it were, upwards from unclean to clean to holy, towards holiness.

[40:40] Or moving down the gradations, if you like, being made unclean, being defiled. Now, there are terms for this.

So to go from being unclean to clean is to be cleansed or purified. And to go from being clean to holy is being consecrated or sanctified.

So there's words for going up the ladder, as it were. And there's words for coming down the ladder. To move from clean to unclean is to be defiled.

And to move from holiness, to muck about with holiness, to spoil that, is to profane. So there's different words describing moving between these various different states.

And if you lived in that Levitical world all those years ago, the various states are either limited or allowed contact and access.

[41:44] So, for example, spatially, there's places you could not go unless you were in the state of holiness. So you couldn't go into the tabernacle.

And that's one of the things that Hebrews says, isn't it? That only limited access into that holy place. Only the high priest could go in there. And then once a year with an extreme caution and lots of provisions and protection.

And then there's a limit on who you can be with. So there's a social limitation or permission. So you think, for example, of people with leprosy who were set apart.

They were pushed out. You couldn't touch them. And so their disease separated them from normal contact with people. A little bit like the virus now, isn't it?

And then there's a spiritual limitation or allowance. Who can go and be close to God?

[42:53] Well, if you think of it in that way, very few people. In fact, only the high priest could go into the very presence of God.

And the other people stood at a distance. And that idea of distance, spatially and spiritually, sort of linked up. You know, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

We're so far away. We've been expelled from the presence of God. Adam and Eve kicked out of the garden, spatially distant from the garden.

And therefore spiritually distant from God. So this whole thing of spaces and states and being purified and sanctified or being profaning and defiling.

So let's think a little bit more about this moving between states. What were the methods of moving from, moving upwards as it were, moving towards cleansing and sanctification?

[44:00] Well, I'm just giving you an overview of this, I'm afraid. I'm not going into a lot of detail. But in terms of an overview, well, the things that we had read to us about sacrifices.

The female goat we had, or a lamb. He is to bring a female without defect. And all the sacrificial system, all the sacrificial rituals.

So that can cleanse. Anointing with oil was a cleansing, sanctifying thing. Could make somebody holy, as it were. Anointing with oil was one of the things.

Anointing with blood. Blood was a very cleansing material. Shaving. Sometimes the sort of contamination of uncleanness could be removed by shaving.

Bathing. So some forms of uncleanness could be removed by washing, in the same sort of way that we would wash to be clean. And laundering.

[45:06] Cleaning clothes. They were contaminated, they could be cleaned. Sometimes the passage of time, you had to wait a while and sort of seem to get clean by itself.

So here are some methods in the Levitical system of getting clean. And I'll just leave that as an overview there.

Changing of clothing. What were the sort of things that made people unclean? Well, there's all sorts of things. And as I say, I'm just doing a sort of very broad brush here.

Things that were odd or diseased. So I found a little while earlier the example of mildew in a building, which renders it unclean.

And I suppose mildew in a building is something that's odd. It shouldn't be there, should it? It shouldn't have sort of mouldy bits on the wall. Well, that's wrong. So it made the building unclean.

[46:05] Or diseases, like for example skin disease, which messes up your skin and perhaps your appearance. Your hands. That would make you unclean.

Some contact with impurity. So we read that, didn't we? If someone touches human uncleanness. Or if a person touches something ceremonially unclean, like an unclean animal.

Contact with impurity. It's sort of a catching thing. Contagious. Would make you unclean. And there were life processes that would make people unclean.

So the process of birth, strangely enough, would make people unclean. Although birth is perfectly normal. It's not sinful to be born, is it? Death would make someone unclean.

Processes like eating unclean food. So all sorts of things like that to make somebody unclean. And then the more specific, particularly reproductive processes, marital sex.

[47:06] Because they were commanded to increase on the earth and multiply. So that was not a wrong thing. But it brought people into this state of uncleanness.

Not the same as sin in this case, is it? Menstruation or malfunctions in the sexual parts. All these things would make unclean.

So there's a whole realm of things that could make unclean. And of course, once you'd been brought into the state of uncleanness, you needed to go back to the methods for cleansing.

And there were all sorts of methods for doing that. Now what are the effects of this Levitical system? What does it do?

Well, I think one thing it does. It means that you have to think about virtually everything you do. And every moment. And everything you're touching.

[48:05] Everything you're eating. Everything you're cooking. Everything you have to think about in relation to this whole matter of contamination or holiness.

So that's something that they would have had to think about all the time. And I guess that's not a bad prompt for us as Christians in the New Testament, is it? To that carefulness about whether what we are doing is contaminating or holy or what.

So it certainly produces a consciousness of the Lord's presence and the Lord's concern about everything in life. So another comment is that this is sort of strangest about the system. That things that are normal, morally neutral and even good things can make you impure. So again, I just say like giving birth would bring somebody into a state of uncleanness. And that's something good. You know, it's a wonderful thing to have a child, isn't it? But here's a strangeness about this system. And it makes us think, and perhaps it made those people think, that the system itself is not the real thing.

[49:26] Surely it isn't an unclean thing to have a baby. But the system says it is. Why does the system say that? Is it for teaching us something?

For pointing beyond itself? That the system isn't the thing itself, but it's pointing beyond itself to perhaps a deeper reality. In other words, this system is a ritual system. It's a symbolic system. So our translations say ceremonially unclean. But for the original people, that word ceremonially wouldn't have meant anything, I don't think. And it wouldn't have been there in the translation. They were unclean. And yet, the uncleanness is a teaching form of uncleanness. It's sort of symbolic. It's pointing towards something else. And of course, our saviour made this perfectly clear. We're going to read.

[50:32] Please will you look it up. Mark 7, verse 14. This matter of the cleanness of food and washing cups and all that sort of thing.

And the Pharisees were saying, you know, this is dead important. This is really life and death. And Jesus said, well, it's actually not quite like that. In Mark 7, verse 14, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. In other words, what you eat, even if you eat with unwashed hands.

Rather, he says, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. And in verse 17, Mark 7, 17, after he'd left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. And he says, you're so dull. Do you really not realise this? Are you so dull? You don't realise that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean.

[51:46] It doesn't really make you unclean to eat pork sausages or whatever. It doesn't go into his heart, says Jesus, but into his stomach and then out of his body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. So he sort of makes official what had been the case all the time, really. In verse 20, he says, what comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. What makes somebody unclean then? Evil thoughts. Sexual immorality. Sexual immorality. Theft. Murder.

Adultery. Greed. Malice. Deceit. Lewdness.

Envy. Slander. Arrogance. And folly. All these evils come from the inside.

[52:50] And they make somebody unclean. And there's our master. There's our master. Talking about uncleanness. Not saying there's no such thing as uncleanness. But that it's actually a deeper thing than his contemporaries realised.

Jesus doesn't obliterate the idea of clean and unclean. But what he does do, as he so typically does, is to take that and deepen it and make it go right into the heart, internalise it and intensify it. And he says, oh no, it's not eating the wrong sorts of food that make you unclean. It's folly. Sinful foolishness. Or greed.

Or arrogance. Sexual immorality. These things really do make somebody unclean. So let's, for the last few minutes, think about Jesus himself and this matter of unclean and clean and holy.

So I'll just make a few points about this. So, point number one. If you read the Gospels with this in mind, you find that Jesus dealt with a lot of issues to do with cleanness and uncleanness.

[54:05] And we might miss this unless we'd been primed up to this by Leviticus. Jesus dealt with a lot of unclean people. I put the word ritually in there because that's sort of our take on it.

But they would have just said they were unclean. So the leper, for example, he didn't say to Jesus, you can heal me. He said, you can make me clean. And Jesus says, I do want to do that.

Be clean. So Jesus took the leper from the state of uncleanness to cleanness. The woman with the issue of blood.

Now, she says, you can save me. You can make me healthy. Or, if you like, you can make me whole. But the issue of blood is not simply a medical condition, is it?

It's in this degree. Sorry. It's in this realm of being unclean. The issue of blood would have made her unclean.

[55:09] And all the consequences of that for where she could be, who she could be with. So Jesus did something to save her.

You think of the demonized man or men in the tombs. Well, living in tombs, contact with dead bodies, is an unclean thing.

Think of the pigs, the legion sent into the pigs. Pigs being unclean animals. And the people with demons are referred to as people with unclean spirits.

So, again, this idea of unclean, it's not, we shouldn't write this off as being simply a ritual thing that isn't real.

There is a reality to uncleanness. It is an actual spiritual thing. That's why they're called unclean spirits. There's something, how to describe it, tacky, something contaminating, something disgusting about these spirits.

[56:23] And we notice that Jesus has the power to move people into a different spiritual state. So no question of anointing people with oil or telling them to wash their clothes or any of those things.

But Jesus touches the leper and moves him into a state of clean. Jesus simply has the woman touch the hem of his garment, doesn't it?

And she's healed. With a word, Jesus expels the demons and moves the man into his right mind. So Jesus has the power to move people into that different state. He has cleansing power to clean people from their uncleanness.

That's a rather wonderful thing, isn't it? And if you think about it, usually uncleanness is contagious. If somebody clean touches somebody unclean, then the uncleanness moves to the clean person.

[57:30] But with Jesus, it's the opposite. His holiness, his overwhelming cleanness sort of expels the uncleanness of the people that he touches.

Isn't that marvellous? His blood can make the foulest clean. Well, Jesus' touch makes the foulest clean. So let's think about number two.

The work of Jesus brings cleansing. So I've got those two arrows there of the cleansing and purifying and consecrating and sanctifying. And on the other hand, profaning and defiling.

And we'll just have those in the background. And at number two, we say, actually, there's something about the gospel message, the message of Jesus that brings cleaning.

And I'd like you to turn, please, to Acts chapter 15, verses 6 to 12. Where, this is Acts 15, 6 to 12, in the Council of Jerusalem, where they are looking and reviewing what the gospel has been doing amongst Jewish people and amongst non-Jewish people.

[58:44] Non-Jewish people, by definition, being unclean. And in Acts 15, verse 5, some of the party of the Pharisees' people say the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.

In other words, the Gentiles must become Jews, really. And they discuss this. There's much discussion. Acts 15, verse 7.

And then Peter gets up and he says, Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

God, who knows the heart, showed them that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us.

He made no distinction between us and them. For he purified, cleaned, he purified their hearts by faith.

[59:47] So just taking that part of the quote, the Gentiles are the unclean people. And here we have not anointing with oil or changing their clothes or anything, but we have the message of the gospel.

And the message of the gospel as it is believed. And it says, God who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them. So it's a matter of being brought near in acceptance.

And it's said that God did this to the unclean, rough, old Gentiles, just as he did to us. Well, whether us is the apostles or the Jews. It could be either, couldn't it? As I say, I suppose it was Jews. Because we are brought near, they think, by our traditions and knowledge of the law or whatever.

But the Gentiles are brought near too. Well, actually, we're both of us brought near by faith or else we're not brought near at all. And he says he made no distinction between us and them.

[61:01] But what did he do? He purified their hearts by faith. Isn't that an amazing thing? No laundering, no changing of clothes, no washing in that outward sense.

But something remarkable done in the heart or to the heart. Changing the uncleanness, the unacceptability on the basis of faith.

He purified their hearts by faith. God makes clean. Not by touch, but by faith.

And he does it right deep inside. He does it on the inside deeply. That's an amazing thing, isn't it?

Thank the Lord for that. And changing the state, cleaning the heart. He accepts and brings near.

Now, I just have to say amen to that.

[62:11] This is a wonderful gospel, isn't it? Foul, stained, solid people who believe this message are made clean in heart and brought near to a holy God.

That's a miracle. That's a miracle. That's a wonder. Thank you, Lord, for doing that. Number three. And some of these are just saying the same thing in different words.

The work of Jesus does something to holy spaces. Now, you remember that the state's sort of limited which spaces you could be in.

And I just refer us to the space or the boundary between the holy place in the temple and the next level out.

And when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So the way to the holy place was open.

[63:19] The barrier which only the super holy, in the sense of the high priest, could cross is now removed. That's amazing. So let's let the writer to the Hebrews tell us this one.

It's in Hebrews 10, 19, where he says, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body.

I think the new one, you better rearrange that sentence. By the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, that's his body, through the curtain. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and our bodies washed with clean water.

So I did a slightly different translation up there. Since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, that is his body, through the curtain, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and our bodies washed with clean water.

The words, it says pure but clean as well. More basic. So here he says, again, there's a cleaning going on, a cleaning in the heart, a cleaning in the conscience, bodies cleaned with clean water, as it were.

[65:09] And he says, that enables us to enter the most holy place, which only the holy priest could go into. We can enter there by a new and living way, he says.

Well, that's rather amazing, isn't it? What an incentive to come and pray.

Pray some big prayers. Pray prayers about things that we think, oh, even almighty-ness would have a problem with this. Well, actually, almighty-ness can do anything. Let's come and pray.

Let's come and praise. Let's come and meet God. Commune with God through Jesus Christ. We have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

Let us draw near to God. Well, let's draw near. It's a wonderful incentive to do that, isn't it? So I hope we do this every day, to open our Bibles and to pray and to draw near to God, to enter the most holy place.

[66:27] Let's draw near. And the fourth thing here, the cleansing of Jesus sets us free to serve. So let's come back to that original text in Hebrews 9.13.

So here's my translation is a little bit different. I've just rearranged a few things. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean.

Well, the word ceremonially doesn't actually, isn't in the translation, isn't in the original. It says unclean, of course. It sanctifies them so that they are outwardly clean, or more literally, the cleaning of the flesh, the outward stuff.

That's what the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer achieved, cleaned in an outward sense. But the cleaning of the gospel goes inside.

How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we may serve the living God.

[67:41] And that word serve is a sort of spiritual service, priestly service. We can serve the living God. What a privilege that is. What a remarkably deep thing God has done.

How grateful we should be to him. The defilement inside is cleansed. The conscience is cleansed. The place where we feel shame. The place where we feel that our lives have been sullied and nothing can wash away the stain. Remember, wasn't it Lady Macbeth who had committed murder and couldn't get rid of the imaginary blood stain on her hands?

Was it out, out, down spot, wasn't it? Something like that. What can wash away the stain? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. There's power, wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb.

His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood avails for me. How much more, says the writer, how much more will the real thing happen, the real problem of uncleanness, be solved by this cleansing methodology, this blood, this sacrifice?

[69:06] And he says that it cleanses us in this very operational sense from useless, fruitless, dead works.

Now, does he mean the life that you live all the time you have a bad conscience, that sort of struggling, driven, unsatisfactory life going from pillar to post?

Does he mean that, or is he perhaps meaning the works of the rituals that actually don't achieve anything? But whatever it is, that's all left behind. And we are free to genuinely, pleasingly, satisfactorily, acceptedly serve God.

I put there a service that God smiles on. It's hardly believable, is it, that God could look at us and the things that we seek to do for him and smile upon them and say, that is acceptable.

It doesn't make me cross, it makes me pleased. Well, there we come to the end. Uncleanness, the stain on the heart and on the conscience.

[70:25] What can we do to remove that? Well, it's not in our power, but it's a wonderful thing about the power of the Lord Jesus. The one who cleansed the leper.

The one whose blood can make the foulest clean. His blood availed for me. We thank him.

And let us approach the throne of grace with confidence then. Let us draw near to God. Let us have confidence then to the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

And thank him. Amen. Well, we've heard God's word and I hope that has been helpful. We're going to close with this song.

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away. It's a communion hymn. Because communion, the Lord's Supper, is the meal which gets to the heart of things, which gets to the whole matter of Jesus sacrificing himself, as we've been thinking.

[71:32] And yes, I suppose this song points out to us in a rather poignant way that we're not being able to do communion at the moment.

But it also highlights the substance behind the act of communion, the reality of what Christ has done. So we'll sing 1118.

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away. And after this, we'll close in prayer. Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away.

Slain for us. And we remember the promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.

So we share in this bread of life. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King.

[73:12] The body of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, torn for you.

Eat and remember the wounds that heal the death that brings us life. Eat and remember the wounds that heal the death that brings us life.

And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love.

And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love. As a sign of our bonds of love.

Around the table of the King. The blood that cleanses every stain of sin shed for you.

[74:25] Drink and remember the drain desk cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.

So we share in his bread of love. So we share in his bread of life. And we drink of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of grace.

Around the table of the King. And we bring of his sacrifice as a sign of our bonds of love.

And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond. And to remember our call to follow in the steps of Christ.

Christ has his body here on earth. As we share in his suffering.

[75:46] We proclaim Christ will come again. And we'll join in the feast of heaven.

Around the table of the King. Around the table of the King. Around the table of the King.

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us. And we remember the promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.

The body of our Saviour Jesus Christ torn for you. Eat and remember the wounds that heal.

The death that brings us life. Paid the price to make us one. The blood that cleanses every stain of sin shed for you.

[76:48] Drink and remember he drained death's cup. That all may enter in to receive the life of God. And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond.

And to remember our call to follow in the steps of Christ as his body here on earth. So as we go out into this new week. Let's have the cross of Christ towering over our thinking.

Over our actions. Over our emotions. And let's be people who live in the shadow of the cross.

People who've seen and surveyed the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died.

So I'll say a closing prayer. And then we're going to play out with a remix of O Church Arise. Which we sang last week. So you're welcome to keep on with that and sing along with it or listen to it.

But let's close in prayer just now. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

[78:08] And may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Amen. Well, hope to see you again before too long. Hope it's not too long before we meet together.

And until that time, it's bye bye from me. Bye bye.

Bye bye. In the strength that God has given.

With shield of faith and belt of truth. We'll stand against the devil's eyes.

An army hold. Whose battle cry is love. Reaching out to those in darkness. We are called to war.

[79:41] To love the captive soul. But to rage against the captive. And with the sword.

The face to wound it whole. We will fight with faith and battle. When faced with trials on every side.

We know the outcome is secure. The price for hell. The price for which he died.

An inheritance of patience. To the brothers. Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh,

oh, oh So spirit come To strengthen Every stride Giving grace for Every hurdle That we May run

This patient with The prize of The servants good and They grow As saints alone Still rise away

Retailing triumphs His grace We hear the calls And hunger for the day When with Christ We stand

in glory Glory Oh, oh, oh, oh

[82:29] Oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh,
oh, oh, oh Oh, oh.