

Leviticus 12-15

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[0 : 0 0] the family home, our family home, that is the one that we gather in and have for decades on holidays and in reunions, has a basement.

And along the back wall of the basement, humming quietly, is an air purifier. In addition, it was purchased along the way for two reasons.

There are a few of us, the weak ones in our family, I am counted among them, who have allergies or asthmatic-like conditions.

We even have children in our home who carry around inhalers for a simple reason. Breathing is a priority. But it's there for another reason as well.

Beyond us, the air purifier keeps the house itself free from airborne contaminants. We can't see them, but there are microscopic droplets that, if allowed to land even on the residence wall itself, could over time create mold.

[1 : 1 9] And so that you could say the air purifier helps us and the house, the people and the property. And for those reasons, I am forever grateful for two individuals I'm sure you're very familiar with by name, Manfred and Klaus Hammes.

No, I'm convinced it's probably the first time you've ever heard of them. Notice, by way of opening illustration, the acknowledgement of a condition.

Not a sinful one, just one that's the consequence of living in an airborne contaminated world.

But then the ability over time to be welcomed back into that home and be thankful. The condition, followed by the cure, and then a call to ultimate thanksgiving where you can actually sit down with family and enjoy fellowship.

This morning, from Leviticus 12 to 15, we will discover that what is true of our family homes goes for God's home as well. Now, these strange four chapters leading to the middle of the book of Leviticus speak about clean things and unclean things, the need to be pure from things.

[3 : 1 0] Not sinful things, just real things. Because real things are consequential of living in a world that sin has just overrun.

You know, we're not the only ones affected by our sin. I'm glad that Jesus came to save us, but today you're going to see he's actually also very interested to free us from the contaminants and the diseases that plague us.

And in the text, he cares both for the people and his house. I mean, take a look with me. Three scenes.

The first, a young mother who's just had an infant child. There's something there that she needs to step forward into by way of acknowledgement.

She's going to give way in chapter 13, at least the beginning of it, to a man or a woman with leprosy. And what we're going to see there isn't just that somebody steps forward to acknowledge the condition of the world in which we live, given the God who created all things good to begin with.

[4 : 3 4] But how one comes back to give thanks for a cure, even for things like leprosy.

And then finally, chapter 15, this third scene. You move from a young mother with an infant child to a man or woman with leprosy, to, in fact, a man and a woman with just normal bodily discharge.

And there you see, or we'll see, that God cares enough to actually not only have you step forward to acknowledge, not only come back to give thanks, but to sit down in his home in fellowship.

The argument of the text is simply this. Not only does God, through Jesus, pardon us from sin, but one day he will again welcome us into his house, having purified it from all the consequences of sin as well.

Isn't that great to know? You're not only going to deal with your sin, and he's going to situate it where you're not going to need an inhaler at the same time. A young mother and her infant child,

chapter 12.

[5 : 57] What's the condition? Well, it was there in the first seven verses. You can glance your eyes back and forth across this sermon into the text, but the condition was simply one where she was considered to be unclean as a consequence of blood flow, which is quite natural when giving birth.

It's the blood which is said to make her unclean. The cure for the condition was simply time.

Give the right allotment of time, God says, and you're free to come back to church. You know, I've always kind of liked Christ Church Chicago.

We've got some mothers in here. They'll give birth one day and be in church the next, but this is Leviticus, not Christ Church. I must confess, though, it raises kind of an obstacle.

There's a hurdle in the text. There's a problem in my mind. What is it about childbirth in ancient Israel or any culture at all that would keep a mother from going to church for a time?

[7 : 14] And why is she allowed to return when she returns? She's got to bring some turtle dove or some sacrifice in order to acknowledge. She's got to step forward in some way.

In this text, I just want to tell you that I've looked all week long, and I can't find the answer for why it is she's considered unclean. I even pulled off commentaries.

I got a few of them on my shelf, trying to do some of the heavy lifting for you before I arrived, because I knew that would be the question you came with. You know, commentaries are good conversation partners.

They line the studies of pastors' walls, and fortunately, they sit on the shelves with their mouths shut until you decide you want to hear from them. So this week, I pulled a few off, and I allowed them, opened their mouth, and I read to see what they had to say.

And one by one, I saw all kinds of interpretations on why giving birth to a child, which is a mysterious and miraculous and holy and beautiful thing, would somehow be connected to that which is unclean.

[8 : 24] And there is not a satisfactory answer from any commentary I looked at. It doesn't exist. The text isn't actually concerned to say why.

Just that it is. So I'm going to venture where fools fear to tread.

Let's say at least this much. The joyous act of bringing life into the world is a good thing and always a good thing. Let's also say, though, in a fallen world, that accompanying this mysterious fact is that when a young mother brings life into the world, she is by nature also bringing an eventual death into the world.

That if life is in the blood and the child enters into the world in our own condition, there's something already inherently being born into that is problematic for the human race.

We trace this back to the original sin of Adam and Eve so that all that fall forth from her body into the human race are by nature having done nothing themselves already stepping forward or through and into a contaminated world.

[9 : 57] The spiritual condition is one in which the psalmist acknowledges, again, in mystery, he says, in sin my mother conceived me. So just as life is in the blood, so too with this blood is death, not her sin, but the effects of it.

Our unclean and contaminated souls bring birth, and they birth sons and daughters, which inherently, in this instance, would keep a young mother from coming into contact with God's house for a time.

And then when the time was complete, she returns. So what does God want us to do with chapter 12 and childbirth?

I think he would just have us be willing to acknowledge before him, yes, I live in a contaminated world, yes, I'm part of something that is unclean by nature.

Yes, I want to acknowledge that there is nothing unclean in your person. And so as I step forward to you, I acknowledge this truth before you.

[11 : 21] you know there's a young couple in the bible who who did this very thing who stepped forward in this way my bible reads in luke chapter 2 that when the time came for their purification according to the law of mooses mary and joseph brought jesus up to jerusalem to present him to the lord as it is written in the law of the lord every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the lord a pair of turtle doves or two pigeons and so they came i mean here's mary mother of god acknowledging that's what she's doing acknowledging i'm under the word that makes demarcations between the one in which

i'm living of and a part of touch and handle and contaminated by and you who are clean in every respect you know you're going to get an opportunity to demonstrate that today those of you who have faith in christ you'll be asked later in the service to to step forward to actually stand in a line and make your way to a table and and when you come to the table yes we are fundamentally thanking god for providing a cure that allows for the forgiveness of sins but even more i just want you to sense today you step forward to acknowledge i'm a man that's just done clean and i understand that you're not and it's things like this ancient law in leviticus that even mary the mother of jesus was willing to acknowledge as she would enter back into your presence but but to see the fullness of stepping forward to acknowledge the condition of our lives i want to move to the leprosy section in chapters 13 and 14 because there's something here about not just stepping forward to acknowledge these things but how it is we come back to express thanksgiving for cure in other words not just the condition of life but the cure that comes so put your eyes on chapter 13 and glance for yourself even rehearsing some of the things that emerge in the reading of it it's not blood as an issue here of uncleanness but it's just a skin disease and skin diseases are not ultimately the consequence of some spiritual condition of the one who gets it i mean it's been a bad year hasn't it for winter sicknesses things coming for no particular reason how terrible it would be to live in a world where you began to equate physical maladies with spiritual realities how unfortunate it would be to see someone who's suffering a disease a skin disease and somehow equating they must be somehow spiritually out of step no it has nothing to do with sin just

I just live in a I just live in a disease infested world and I know that God well there's nothing of disease nature to him this thing on leprosy clean and unclean in these two chapters alone 13 and 14 the word unclean appears 21 times it's just this refrain it really is the song that has no end somebody said I ought to title my sermon today a shower isn't going to get it done this this constant need of unclean 21 times clean is mentioned 20 times that's 41 times in two chapters you're being asked to weigh these words to then be clean or cleansed is mentioned six times and again it's not the sin but the effects of living in a world contaminated as a consequence of our sin leprosy from what I understand comes from some inherent connection to bacteria transferred through droplets mainly by coughing or they're airborne back to my air purifier idea but air pollution

I mean people are giving their lives to it in the world in which you and I live legislation comes forward for it platforms are built to address it air pollution can be chemical it can be physical it can be biological this is all from what I've read I'm not smart in these ways air pollutants can come in the form of gas whether it's ozones or nitrogen oxides or sulfur dioxide or carbon monoxide or ammonia or methane it can come in all kinds of different ways as our books will tell us but we do know that air pollution can cause disease it can cause allergy it can cause death it can cause harm to crops it can cause harm to animals it harms the natural environment for example all of these things are true and in this case Leviticus 13 and 14 it's this airborne bacteria if you hang around it long enough it was actually having an effect on skin diseases and the stigma the stigma was not only that people began to think you must be out of sorts with God because you're sick but it was a socially ostracizing thing it was a quarantining thing

I mean take a look at two verses in that section that we didn't have read this morning but by way of evocative and provocative social implication lay out the disastrous effects of having this skin disease verse 45 and 46 of chapter 13 my Bible reads this way the leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out unclean unclean and he shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease he is unclean he shall live alone his dwelling shall be outside the camp wow the social implications of living in the world in which we do not only is this person then kept from going to God's house but just think how disastrous this is they're kept from going to their own house they can't go to their friend's house completely isolated now what what are we to do with this well first thank God for medicine in our day

I mean seriously we gotta get on our knees and thank God that there are many diseases that can be mitigated overcome even released from there are those that can that are deadly or were deadly that can now be made chronic even though we all know we'll be leaving this world as a result of something but did you know that when Jesus walked he his mother stepped forward to acknowledge her condition but the son stepped out and demonstrated his power to alleviate the condition I mean take a look throw yourself forward into the Bible pretty far forward I'm looking at Luke I think verse 11 of chapter 17 on the way to Jerusalem

[20 : 34] Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee and as he entered a village he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices saying now just after hearing Leviticus you're ready for them to say what they're going to say here they are ten of them lift up their voices saying unclean unclean but no Jesus Master have mercy on us and when he saw them now notice from a distance when he saw them he said to them go and show yourselves to the priest and they went and they were cleansed in other words they went to the priest and the priest said whatever you got is going away or whatever you got is gone Jesus does more than merely save people from sin he is vested in ways that allow you to come back and give thanksgiving to him that's the way that story ends in Luke then one of them verse 15 when he saw that he was healed turned back praising God with a loud voice and he fell on his face at Jesus feet giving him thanks now he was a Samaritan that is an outsider then Jesus said we're not ten cleansed like where are your nine buddies where are the nine was no one found to return and give praise to

God except this foreigner and he said to him rise and go on your way your faith has made you well what happened is that this one came back to give thanks for being healed from a skin condition all right let's make it real you've been sick this winter I thank God for medicine but did you thank God for Jesus Jesus can heal he's not obligated to heal in fact these New Testament healings are so provocative and powerful because as we read of the healing of a paralytic in Mark 2 we learned the purpose for all these miracles in his earthly ministry he didn't heal everyone but his miracles were there to vindicate his message the message is I can forgive your sins to vindicate that watch what I do with your sickness and he can do that for us I'm sure there's somebody here that could testify to how he's raised you up I'm sure there are moments in life when you found yourself on a bed for weeks perhaps days wondering if you'd ever get up I'm sure there are people here that wondered you know what I wasn't sure I'd see today but Jesus cared not only for my sin but for the fact that I'm living in a disease filled world and he wanted me on my feet for a little longer yet I'm thanking God because I'm vertical that's what he wants he wants you today not only to step forward and acknowledge your condition but he wants you to come back and to offer thanksgiving for a cure which leads us to 15 doesn't it this strange chapter on bodily discharges things that make one uncomfortable even to have read in church and wow you think this is bad wait till you come back for 18 and 20 by the way

I'm grabbing those two chapters together because I'm not going to have you sit through it twice Jesus has the power to deal with the spiritual and dislocation that's brought on by this discharge as well I want to draw attention to the extended suffering of the woman in chapter 15 in chapter 15 of Leviticus we're given in verse 25 something that's beyond just the normal monthly cycle he writes if a woman has a discharge of blood for many days not at the time of her menstrual impurity or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity all the days of her discharge she shall continue in uncleanness as in the days of her impurity she shall be unclean how terrible this is isolated again socially dislocated of no fault of her own it's the effects of living in a world gone wrong and then we have

Jesus who cares not only to hang on a cross for your iniquities but he also wants to carry your infirmities he wants to draw close to you in your hour of need again he does something like this might as well put your eyes on it one last time the third of these three movements in Luke 15 now I'm losing it wrote it down wrong in my notes so I just have to tell it the way the writer to the Hebrews does where he says well somewhere in the Bible it refers to well it's the same thing here there's a woman let's put her in Mark 5

[27 : 25] I'm guessing who's had 12 years of this blood flow which have kept her from going to church because you know I I'm supposed to stay away till this goes away 12 years of daily struggle 12 years probably of going to all kinds of doctors looking for cures and it says that this woman had a discharge of blood for 12 years Mark 5 25 and she had suffered much under many physicians interesting you know suffered much under the physician and had spent all that she had so now she has no money and she was no better but rather worse she had heard the reports about

Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment for she said if I touch even his garments I will be made well and immediately the flow of blood dried up she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease and Jesus perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him immediately turned around in the crowd and said who touched my garments and his disciples said to him you see the crowd pressing around you and yet you want to know who touched you and he looked around to see who had done it but the woman knowing what had happened to her came in

fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the truth and he said to her daughter he not only wants you to acknowledge your condition by stepping forward to do so he not only wants you to come back to him and give thanks he actually wants you to go in peace where you can sit at table with him you know the writer to the

Hebrews is going to move on and with this I'm about done that Jesus when he went into heaven to make satisfaction for sin well all that stuff was being done down here on kind of a model form with the tabernacle but he goes into the heavens to not only forgive your sins but to in a sense make sure that God's house isn't going to be a place for any of the infirmities or the contaminants! so that when you come to Jesus you actually come with the promise that one day on the backside of laying your life down you walk into his presence and you and I will say thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you I'm stepping forward to say thank you I can't believe I get to come back and say thank you I'm amazed that you have made this entire thing called heaven free of any need of an air purifier free of any effects of what was just attaching itself to us while we were there free from disease sickness pain sorrow tears it all he wants it all he took it all he carried it all he did so outside the camp in order that you and I could enter into a home for what's got to be the best holiday we can ever imagine the promise is there to enter into a home that doesn't have to be cleaned every week thank

God house cleaning the constant chore the constant chore get it done this Saturday and you'll have to do it again next but with Jesus the day is coming when we step forward you know who I am when we come back thank you again when we sit down and have sweet fellowship not only with him but with all who look to him in faith our heavenly father we now come to the lord's table where those who have faith step forward to acknowledge their condition to thank you for the cure and to go home in celebration we do this in Jesus name amen amen

[32 : 43] Thank you.