

Leviticus 11

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[0 : 00] Well, buckle up. You're in for a surprise this morning.

The text is coming for you. It's coming with energy. It's going to come with encouragement. It's going to come with hope. It's going to come with holiness.

So get ready. Don't let your mind take you where you want it to go as you heard the chapter read aloud in your hearing.

For I have discovered this week in Leviticus 11 of all places that we run headlong into the idea that, and here it is, just when it looked as though Israel was beyond all hope.

Just when it looked like the failure of Nadab and Abihu in chapter 10 would derail any opportunity for God to draw near to them or them to God, a plan emerged, a plan that was in the mind of God from before time began, that would not only allow a holy God to settle in their midst and us with him, but it would provide the opportunity for you and me to become more like him.

[1 : 29] Let me get it as clean as I can. When we were beyond all hope, God, who is holy, invited us to sit down with him, set out for him, and become more like him.

And that's out of Leviticus 11. Prove it, you say. And I don't blame you. I get it.

Getting from food laws to a fulfilling life with God might seem a bridge too far.

But listen, the hope you and I have of God drawing near to us comes from this text in the echoes that these food laws have with words put down in the Garden of Eden.

Hope here from the echoes of Eden. I'll try to prove that. Secondly, the hope we have of drawing near to God comes in the evenings of this text, the portion that we ran over, verses 24 to 40, that which took place only until evening.

[3 : 01] Hope comes here in the evenings of Israel's life, the end of each and every day. Finally, the hope that we have of becoming more like God is going to come from Jesus, who alone can pronounce any of us clean and provide the power to live a life consecrated to him.

If you're wondering how we move through a chapter as arcane as this, it's simply in these headers, hope from the echoes of Eden, verses 1 to 23.

Hope in the evenings and at the end of every day, 24 to 40. And hope in good news, that is for everyone, 41 to 47.

The hope is hinted at in the echoes of Eden.

There's a, my mind, a blank space that separates the last sentence of chapter 10, which Pastor Pace preached last week, and the first sentence of chapter 11 that we look at today.

[4 : 27] The space between these two chapters is, in my opinion, the lowest point in the story of the Bible. The Bible, as it has been telling itself from the creation account up until now.

Yes, the failure of Adam and Eve to obey God's word on what could and could not be eaten in the garden was tragic. But Leviticus 10, the failure of Nadab and Abihu seems to have squandered any opportunity of restarting with God.

For Israel, it must have seemed impossible to recover from their sin. The hope of drawing near to God with sacrifices that brought them to the east entrance of the gate and then the sacrifices that the priests made which actually moved beyond the gate to the bronze altar and beyond that into the tent of meeting where they ate.

Well, those looked like they had promised. We were approaching and drawing near to God. Chapters 1 through 7 of Leviticus. The hope was there.

In chapters 8 and 9 though, it increased for we saw the consecration of the priests and we saw Aaron and Moses not only move into and through the eastern gate, not only go beyond the bronze altar, not only enter into the tent of meeting, but into the very holy place of God where he dwelt and he spoke and we were with him and he was our God.

[6 : 13] And when that opened and they came out and the glory of God descended and the blessing of Aaron was pronounced on all the people, it was the high water mark.

Forever since the Garden of Eden and their exit, God's people had never dwelt in his presence like this. Hope was high.

And then came chapter 10. The sin of Nadab and Abihu. The sin where they squandered the opportunity to be with God.

Sin and death and the carrying of their bodies back out through the tent beyond the altar that would cleanse the hands beyond the bronze basin and grill upon which sacrifices were to go out through the gate and their bodies buried into an unknown place signifying that God's people could no longer stand in God's presence.

I am convinced of this that the distance between chapter 10 and 11 that space between these two chapters in Leviticus is the low point in the story the Bible has been telling from the very beginning.

[7 : 44] And yet the questions then are there how can God ever settle in with us? How can we possibly ever set out with him?

How can we do this? How do we represent him for we are not even close to looking like him? And so starts chapter 11.

It opens with glimmers of hope that are reemerging for a compromised covenantal community. For here again we see God speaking and as we draw near enough this morning to listen in we learn that the story God started writing in Genesis 1 and 2 is still being written.

The Israel which is now completely utterly fully compromised to that Israel God would accommodate he would condescend hope would come from the echoes of Eden the food laws are mirroring the message of Eden I want you to just see the parallels or at least hear them this morning in the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 we find God separating things out between one another and we find the same thing here in the creation account we read of God's creatures that are in the seas as we read of them here in the creation account we have terms like to swarm and to creep used together just as we see here in the creation account we read of living creatures as we have here in the

Genesis account we find the phrase that everything is made according to their kind just as we have here and there is more in both accounts divided creatures are separated into four kinds there are land animals water creatures air and swarming creatures and in Leviticus 11 the text neatly orders them I hope you caught it it divides it out in regard to the land animals just take a look verse 2 through 8 followed by the water and sea creatures just take a look verse 9 through 12 and then the birds in the fowl of the air verses 13 through 23 mirroring the message of Eden in which God had created all of this and there called it very good and there's two more important echoes from Eden still first look with me at a portion of the scriptures that we did not read this morning but is fascinating look at the one creature in verses 42 and 43 that Israel was to find most detestable most defiling it's the one according to verse 42 and 43 that goes on its belly now the only other time we had a creature of this phrase that goes on its belly is in reference to the serpent in the garden who deceived

[11 : 33] Adam and Eve in the first place it is possible perhaps that in the garden the serpent maneuvered his way through the world high and elevated gliding as it were across the surface vertically and now relegated under the curse to go forth forever on its belly and the one on its belly is in our chapter defined as the one that is most detestable most despised and even so there is another echo from Eden more important than even this notice how God reasserts that food laws will be the marker of whether his people are honoring him as God or not did not the Genesis account begin in the same way did not God put forward a food law upon Adam and Eve on what they could and they could not eat so here

Israel is commanded all the way through on what it can and what it cannot eat the echoes of Eden are replete in the language in the chapter of Leviticus 11 so what's the significance of it by drawing on Genesis 1 and 2 Leviticus 11 is pulling the reader from the hopelessness of Leviticus 10 into an understanding that God is not done with what he started now come on you should be ready for this Leviticus 11 is the hard reset on Genesis 1 and 2 rather than bailing out on Israel because of their sin God is mercifully bending down toward Israel in order to fulfill his promise to them although they had no hope of ever completing their promises made to him this then is a chapter of hope it's hope through the echoes of Eden can you hear it do you have ears to hear it

God is not done with Israel he's not done with his story he might not be done with you now tell me is there anyone here this morning who feels I may be beyond hope I'm a Leviticus 10 kind of man or woman I've failed God one too many times I've squandered my attempt to restart things I've shattered the opportunity to re-begin things I've compromised myself to where God can no longer condescend well Leviticus 11 is almost your gospel because if he can yet determine in his own person that I will settle in your midst you compromise people I will find a way for you to draw near to me I will empower you one day to live in accordance with ways that reflect my very character then there is hope for you although

Israel was compromised God would accommodate and the food laws are the external indicators that prove their willingness to live like Adam of old but in a fallen world fallen twice over now and so we might be right no we would be right to ask is this then the way that we are to draw near to God today is this the way God draws near to us is Leviticus 11 with all of its particularity in food law practices the word we are to obey do food laws fulfill your life these are questions that arise in our mind as we've heard the echoes of Eden but the text itself is moving so quickly it won't let us answer that just yet

I want you to see how the text moves from the insistent echoes of Eden where you overhear God intends to draw near to what happens in verses 23 to 40 which build upon that expectation and shows that God intends to make it possible for them to draw near to him and to do so daily let me just lay it out for you what happens here is that the uncleanness that would be transmitted to the individual who touches a dead carcass in the world would only make them unclean until the evening take a look verses 23 to 40 verse 24 you shall be unclean until the evening well that's a grace God who is holy in whom is life and there is no death is willing to make us unclean when touching death but only to the evening you can see it in 25 only to the evening in 27 unclean until the evening and 28 and 31 and 32 and 39 and 40 twice over unclean only until the evening that's good news

[17 : 40] I don't know about you I don't know what you're touching today but when God looks down he's accommodating Israel's life in a contaminated and fallen world and he's not only providing an understanding from the echoes of Eden that Israel is now what Adam once was but that when you inescapably find your way touching that which God cannot dwell with well guess what you get a fresh start come every morning hope in the evening through the mercies that come at the end of a day this is where the song in my mind just came to me his mercies go ahead you finish it they are new now you don't know your

Bible his mercies are new every morning if you are sitting here today and you feel you are so compromised beyond God's ability to condescend to meet your needs may the echoes of Eden provide a glimmer of hope that his story is not yet completely written and if you are here today wondering how do I do this day by day because every day I live under the guilt and the weight of the death of my own life and the life of those around me and the unholy characteristics of it all well God is willing to say yes you're unclean only till evening I'll see you come tomorrow morning and we'll take it another run these are merciful words these are kind words these are gracious words our hope comes in the evening at the end of the day which leads the writer then to describe for the reader the purposes for which these temporary food laws and daily renewals are given it's worth looking at again it's worth reading in full again why these things verse 44 a purpose clause as it were again pay attention to the little words in the

Bible for this is why for I am the Lord your God consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy you shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground for I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God you shall therefore be holy for I am holy this is the law about the beast and the bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground to make in order that purpose clause to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creatures that may be eaten and the living creatures that may not be eaten the food laws for Israel notice had a purpose they were to consecrate themselves they were to separate Israel from all other nations I mean the whole world is contaminated and yet these foods are simply to be unclean it says continually for you for you for you these are external ceremonial words by way of command that point for us and to the world for us they say

God is a holy God God has saved me for something different than this world and the world will have no picture of the God who is holy if his people are not committed to the distinctions and the separations from things which are pure or right or good it would remind them that God is not like them it would remind them that God does distinguish between that which is clean and unclean even though we have lost the ability to make ourselves clean let me be as clear as I can the food laws are the external signs meant to signify something of internal significance that they are external rules that are meant to point to an inward reality even though they're applied to

Israel when they have not yet been made clean by God they're ceremonially applied to the covenantal family prior to the cleansing that this story will ultimately give I'm convinced that the food laws are temporary and they are not the things that will help God draw near to you today or you draw near to God primarily because as the story unfolds in the New Testament one comes along by the name of Jesus who actually gets beyond the external things to the internal realities and because he was born of God righteousness from God he enters into the world uncontaminated by our own sin in fact the Bible refers to him as a second Adam he is external righteousness placed into a compromised world in which as he lives perfectly in obedience to

[23 : 54] God he not only represents Adam the way Israel wanted to but couldn't he represents Israel don't you forget the very first temptation he faces when he goes into the wilderness is related to food as the tempter comes to him and says now I know you want to follow God's word but why don't you make some bread out of this stuff and he says oh no man doesn't live by bread he lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and because he's in verse 14 calling the people to himself hear me all of you and understand there's nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him but the things that come out of a person are what defile him and when he had entered the house and left the people his disciples asked him about the parable and he said to them are you without understanding do you not see that whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is expelled thus says the writer he declared all foods clean because he's getting at something deeper and he said what comes out of a person is what defiles him for from within out of the heart of man come evil thought sexual immorality murder theft alterity coveting wickedness deceit sensuality he goes on a run envy slander pride foolishness all these evil things come from within and they are what defile a man so that

Jesus now arrives and says the food laws aren't going to enable God to draw near to you they were external temporal indicators trying to signify an internal heart that had not yet been cleansed but couldn't do it on their own and so he himself comes to the eastern gate he himself will walk into Jerusalem and pass by the bronze altar of sacrifices he himself will dispel all the external things meant to signify a people trying to demonstrate that there was a holy God he himself will pray to the holy place not on earth where it was only the pattern but in heaven where it was real he himself will shed his blood in the most intimate of ways as a holy sacrifice that would cleanse any who would come to him no wonder the temple curtain then is torn into signifying a new access point now it took the church a while to get hold of that because they'd lived a long time thinking that you know if I can look clean act clean do clean well then

I must be clean it took Peter a little longer than most to sort this thing out in fact he wasn't going to get out of this without a vision so just as Jesus told a story to declare all foods clean Peter had to see a vision to recognize that there were no distinctions in God between who could come to him and who couldn't and so he sees a big a big Arabian carpet in the sky coming down with all the creatures of Leviticus 11 that were unclean and the vision he hears from God's voice basically saying hey Pete time for you to take time for you to eat Peter says no can't do that gotta retain my external conformity to a heart that would desire you vision comes down again no Peter you don't understand this not only are all foods clean but you're wrong to consider that some people are clean by doing life the way you're doing it

God is ready to meet with everyone anyone everywhere anywhere and so Peter is like whoa the dudes are at my door they want me to go see Cornelius he's not a person of God and now I'm putting it together the hope comes not only from the echoes of Eden hope comes not only from the indicators that every evening Israel is going to get another run hope comes from the Lord Jesus Christ himself who can look at you he can look at me and he can say let me tell you I draw near to you on the cross you draw near to me in faith and you will be cleansed it was Peter even earlier was it not who Jesus said I'm going to wash your feet Peter says not me I'm not ready for that Jesus said well you don't know what I'm doing but what I'm doing is actually an indicator an external thing of what

I'm getting ready to do which is an internal thing and by my death you may be cleansed this is the good news of the gospel from Leviticus chapter 11 now you didn't think that coming in when you heard it read I know you didn't because I didn't either before I got going one more thing then does that mean that there's no moral force needed for us to be holy I mean if his grace comes in this way then of what need do I have to chase down righteousness in any way shape or form if the food laws and the practices are now obsolete then do

[30 : 34] I still need to separate myself from things that are unclean is there a need for me to be holy even though he has already made me healthy interestingly there's a lot of preaching a lot of doctrine a lot of thought out there that says thank God Jesus got Leviticus 11 done because you couldn't do it and you should go home and praise God that he did it for you game over let's have lunch but Peter interestingly Peter says that although the particular practices of the food laws are done the moral principles that were underneath it are still in place you got to see it because with this I'm sitting down but in first Peter he picked up on this and he quotes from

Leviticus 11 of all places he says in verse 12 of chapter 1 therefore preparing your minds for action be sober minded set your hope there's our word for the sermon fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ the grace that God has for you isn't just done when you accept Christ as your savior and the one no there is a grace that will be brought to you at his return verse 14 as obedient children do not be conformed to the holy you also be holy in all your conduct here it is Leviticus 11 since it is written you shall be holy for I am holy the moral force for you and for me isn't what you're going to eat or not eat it's what moral practices you're going to feast on or not feast on which is why he's going to go on in 1

Peter and say simply you were born perishable you got to long for the pure milk of the word you got to put away envy malice strife you having been made righteous must be righteous says Peter and says Jesus and says the pastor to himself and to us all now this chapter just kept rising echoes that told me the story is not done evenings that indicated a new day would yet come and indeed a son who would make me clean but require of me a life lived in love to him our heavenly father we come week by week to this book which is so strange and unfamiliar and yet even here you have a word for our family this week

I pray Lord that your spirit would empower those of you those of us who have faith in Christ not to simply rest upon the grace of believing but press on in holiness until the grace which will come at your appearing may we become like you may we daily return to you you who had not finished the story of your own love may you not be done yet with the story of our lives create in us a clean heart take not your spirit we ask in his name amen