

Daily Holiness

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- [0 : 0 0] Over the past couple of decades, and maybe even for a little bit longer than that, there's been a new brand of Christianity that's popping up for a variety of reasons. It's kind of a new flavour of church.
- And this movement is led by people who basically say that they couldn't live up to the standards that the traditional church was holding them to. And their response to that is to create churches where sin and failure is almost celebrated.
- In these churches, the pastors pride themselves on swearing from the pulpit. They pride themselves on gaining street cred with outsiders through drinking exploits, sexual conquests, and a bunch of other things that the more conservative churchgoers amongst us might find a little bit embarrassing.
- But here's the thing. These people, to their mind, are trying to follow Jesus. Their life choices are guided by the understanding that God welcomes sinners on no merit of their own, so why stress about trying to change?
- And let's especially not put that pressure on anyone else. Their gospel message amounts to something like, do whatever you want, God will love you anyway. Now, as you can probably imagine, this gospel has been well received.
- [1 : 2 9] I mean, it's all the perks of God, minus any of the more difficult bits. It's all grace. It's no holiness. And let's be honest, there might be a small part of us that hears that and thinks, I wouldn't mind that version of following Jesus.
- The version that says, hey, Jesus died for you so that you could be forgiven, so don't worry about the rules. Well, that's what we're up to in Leviticus.
- Last week, we looked at the Day of Atonement in chapter 16. God had provided very strict rules and guidelines for how this day worked, very strict rules for their worship.
- There was priests that had to be dressed certain ways. There were specific sacrifices, all for the purpose of making atonement for the sins of the people. So God has drawn the people into his presence by grace.
- God has just dealt with the fact that the people are failing at following the rules. He's just overcome their inability to obey him. And so you would think that more rules would be a strange place to go.
- [2 : 4 1] Having just dealt with the failure of the rules, to then give more rules seems a little ridiculous. And yet, chapter 17 begins like this. The Lord said to Moses, speak to Aaron and his sons, to all the Israelites and say to them, this is what the Lord has commanded.
- Chapter 18 begins, the Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live.
- And you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I'm bringing you. Do not follow their practices. Chapter 19, the Lord said to Moses, speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.
- Holiness still matters to God even after grace. Even after dealing with the problem, holiness still matters.

I mean, Israel has just been visibly and ritually, symbolically cleansed. That was the point of the sacrifice of the day of atonement. Laws and rules are straight away brought back into the equation.

[3 : 50] So atonement didn't actually remove the law. It didn't even make it unimportant. So what did it do?

We've got to remember the big picture, the main game of what God is doing here in Leviticus. And not just here in Leviticus, but in all of the Bible and in all of human history.

God's agenda for Israel is not just to wipe them clean. He wants to dwell with them. Relationship is the goal. He wants them to be in his presence, to have ongoing relationship.

And so everything in the Bible up to this point, the rescue from Egypt, the commandments being given, the clean and unclean food laws, the specifics of the priests and how they dress, the tabernacle and how it was to be made, the purifying of sacrifices, all of it was to make it possible for people to enter the presence of God.

That was the whole point, that God wanted them to be able to come and worship him. Because that's really what worship means. Worship is entering into the presence of God, drawing near to God through the way that he has opened.

[5 : 06] Worship is relating to God appropriately, the way that he deserves. And God wasn't looking for visitors. That wasn't the goal, that Israel would come visit him occasionally and be appropriate or clean or acceptable.

God wanted worshippers, full-time worshippers, people who lived for him and with him. And so now that they've been cleansed and already drawn into God's presence, the law functions to define what worship looks like.

The law's function is to show us what life looks like now that they've been drawn into God's presence. It's you've been cleansed, so now live clean.

It's kind of like God's way of saying, your old life was you playing around in the mud. I've done the hard job of cleaning you off, don't jump back in the mud. I've provided some fresh, pristine grass over here, play there.

God is defining what life is like now that you're clean, not do this in order to be clean. Now that Israel is the other side of the Day of Atonement, the law is not trying to answer the question, how do I get into the presence of God?

[6 : 29] That question's already answered by the Day of Atonement, by the sacrifices repeated annually. These laws are God defining what day-to-day life looks like for his people.

It's God showing them what it looks like to be in his presence. Obedience to the law has now become how you worship God. It's become an extension of their gathering, an extension of their formal time together in the tabernacle.

This is a part of their response to his holiness and to his grace in drawing them to himself. Now for them, that whole connection to go from formal worship to all of life worship would have been kind of obvious.

See, for them, life was literally built around the tabernacle. The camp of Israel had the tabernacle at the center. At the center, that was where they met with God.

That was where the sacrifices happened. That's where the priests worked. It was at the center of the camp and around that tent was where everybody lived. And so sure, you went to the tabernacle on specific days and at specific times and for specific reasons.

[7 : 41] But when you came out the front door of your tent to go and buy bread from next door, you were literally in the shadow of God's house. When you were yelling at your kids for making too much noise and waking you up early, you were literally in the shadow of God's house.

God is saying, my presence is especially in the tabernacle, but it's more than that now. You've been brought into my presence, into a relationship with me. God is saying, if you want to worship me, it can't be limited to a set of rituals, a set of formal gatherings.

They're important, they're even essential, but it can't be just that. Daily holiness, daily obedience, full-time worship is what God desires and what he deserves.

And the law is the gift that he gives us to show us what that will look like, to show us how we're supposed to function now that we're in his presence full-time. It's obedience to his standards, holy living in response to his grace.

Grace came first, but law remains because of who God is. Law remains to help us understand more of his character.

[9 : 05] Israel has been brought into the presence of God, but he remains a holy God. And so holiness is required for life lived in his presence.

But how much more for us now compared to them? We live on the good side, not just of Israel's Day of Atonement Festival with the goats and the bulls and the priests and all that sort of stuff.

We're on the good side of Easter. We're on the good side of God providing the once-for-all sacrifice for sin in Jesus. We're on the good side of God saying that I can deal with all of your sins irreversibly in the sacrifice of my son.

We're on the good side of God saying Jesus is now the only priest forever who sits at God's right hand interceding for us.

And because of him, we have confidence, the New Testament says, confidence to march into the throne room of a holy God and call him Father. How much more with the access that we have, which is far greater than they ever enjoyed in the Leviticus.

[10 : 18] How much more do we need God's law as a guide for us for how we might best live in his presence? How we might best worship this God who has done everything to draw us into relationship with him.

How much more do we need and should we appreciate this gift of the law? Because it gives us the answer to the question, how do I love?

How do I reflect and communicate gratitude to the God who gave his son so that I could know him? Jesus himself says when you get to the New Testament, if you love me, you will obey my commands.

The evidence of love for God, the evidence of worship, is not just how holy you seem on a Sunday night, how focused you seem, how many notes you took, how many weeks in a row you've been here, how loud you sang.

They're all good things. But the evidence of a holy life, the evidence of worship, is what the rest of your week looks like. How conscious you are of the presence of God in your day to day.

[11 : 36] Now, if obedience is the evidence, we need to make a quick detour, a quick side point here. So obedience matters. That's clear. But obedience to what?

Obedience to what? For us who are living on this side of Jesus' death and resurrection, which laws still count? Which ones do we have to do? How do we figure it out?

Or, as Steve put it in week one of this series, in case you missed it, if I can eat prawns, why is gay sex wrong? Because just a couple of chapters ago, there was all these rules about what to eat and not eat.

And in chapter 18 that we didn't read today, in chapter 20, which is the other side of today's passage, there's a whole bunch of specific rules about sexual purity, including the call not to have gay sex.

So how do we figure out which ones we have to listen to? Well, firstly, and this is really important, grace, Jesus, doesn't delete the law.

[12 : 38] Jesus says in Matthew 5, he's come to fulfill the law, every bit of it. He says we're not allowed to remove even a word from it.

So as a starting point, all of it matters. But even though grace hasn't deleted it, it has done something to it. It has transformed it.

What do we mean? What does Jesus mean when he says he's fulfilled it? Well, let's look at three different kinds. First of all, there's the laws about clean and unclean. Laws around foods and different things.

Those laws are superseded. They're replaced. They existed to create a distinction between God's people who did one thing and everybody else who did something else.

They were physical markers. But Jesus makes it explicitly clear in the New Testament. In Mark 7, he says food doesn't have the power to make you unclean. In fact, he declares all food clean.

[13 : 40] So he explicitly tells us we can leave those ones behind. But the reason we can is because the physical marker has been replaced by a spiritual marker. Because uncleanness is not a dirt issue.

It's a heart issue. And it's an issue that can only be overcome through Jesus' death in our place. So the cleaning work is a work of the Holy Spirit, not a work of your diet.

And so we can leave those things behind. Cleanness still matters. Clean and unclean distinction still matters. But it's just not expressed in diet anymore.

It's expressed through those who trust Jesus and have been made clean and those who are trying to make themselves clean. And it's not working. That's the first one, the clean, unclean laws.

The second kind of laws that we've looked at as we've been through Leviticus is ritual laws. The laws that tell us about who can be priests, what the priests have to wear, what day they should go to the tabernacle, what shape the tabernacle should be, what material for the temple in the tabernacle, what material for the utensils in the tabernacle, how to clean them, who cleans them, when they clean them, that sort of stuff.

[14 : 53] All of that stuff has been superseded by Jesus. It's been replaced by Jesus. Again, in Hebrews in the New Testament, it's explicit. Jesus has become the once for all sufficient sacrifice for sin, which means there's no more sacrifices required.

So laws about sacrifices are redundant because the complete sacrifice is done. The account is settled. And then on top of that, we know that he's our high priest forever. So you don't need priests anymore, which means you don't need someone standing at the front in special clothes.

Jesus has replaced that. But the third group within that law in the Old Testament, which is sometimes referred to as the moral laws or the ethical code, the laws about sexual purity, about caring for the poor, about respecting your parents, that sort of thing.

Those are the ones that we have more trouble with, the ones that might be more controversial. Firstly, how are those laws fulfilled? Well, what Jesus does is live in perfect obedience to them in a way that we never could.

What he does is perfectly tick the box, more than tick the box, so that he has passed the standard that the law sets.

[16 : 26] And then what he does is for the person who comes to him seeking forgiveness, he takes his perfect obedience and puts it onto them, so that they have a past level of obedience.

And so our inability to live up to those standards no longer is a barrier to keep us away from God, because Jesus has dealt with that by being perfectly obedient.

But, this law still matters, and let me tell you why. See, for Israel here in Leviticus, having just been made clean, already now in a relationship with God as his people, the laws are there to reflect and reveal God's character to them.

We don't get to the New Testament and have Jesus start flicking away these moral laws as outdated or unimportant. The function of the law was for Israel to see what God cared about, see what mattered to him, to see that he is a pure God who requires purity.

He is a preeminent God who requires exclusive worship. These laws shift from being oppressive standards that we have to reach to being a model of what it looks like to live the life that God has designed.

[18 : 00] A model of what it looks like to live in the presence of God, because these are the expressions of him, the extensions of his character. God's grace to his people in the day of atonement, and ultimately in Jesus, drags worship out of a formal ritualistic setting and spills it out into the day-to-day life of people.

And so now, through obedience to these laws, we worship God. We don't convince him to take us into his presence.

He's done that. But these laws are there to show us, if you love me, this is what it looks like to love me. If you want to worship me, this is what it looks like to worship me.

Now all of life can be lived and must be lived worshipping God for those who belong to him. Now at first, this blurring of lines between formal worship in the temple and all of life worship might feel like this is a little oppressive.

Like there's even more opportunities for you to stuff this up now. You can kind of understand those churches that are thinking this would be easier if we just pushed the laws to the side and focused on the forgiveness stuff. Because if we're supposed to worship God all the time, if these laws matter that much, it feels like there's more pressure.

[19 : 28] That is except for one thing. Worship doesn't just include this all of life daily obedience. It empowers it.

Worship doesn't just include every minute of every day and the obedience to these laws. Worship, being in the presence of God, empowers obedience to these laws, motivates obedience to these laws.

Now what made Israel holy here in Leviticus is not what they did. It's God. It's what he was doing.

He is the basis for their holiness. Holiness means being set apart, being chosen. When God chose them, he made them holy.

It was he who chose them and in choosing them, set them apart as his, belonging to him as holy. And it's through the ongoing meeting with him that they progressively become more sanctified or more holy in their actions.

[20 : 39] God's holiness, his purity rubs off on them as they spend time with him. So if you think of it like God is the sun. Now when you lie in the sun, its radiance will bring you color and warmth.

Different colors depending on your skin type. But it will bring you color and warmth and heat and health to your body. Case in point is the two fairly tanned, relaxed, healthy looking people in the front row.

Now in the same way, basking in God's presence, basking in his glory and holiness in the formal gatherings at the temple, at the tabernacle, using the forms that God had prescribed for Israel was designed to make them holy.

to progressively transform them. In fact, we can push this analogy a little bit further. Having just understood that worshiping God's presence now kind of flow through all of life, what's the uniqueness of gathering then?

It's almost like the difference between sunbaking and just walking to work when the sun is out. Now if the sun is out both times, you will get some heat, some light, some warmth.

[21 : 56] You will get some awareness of its benefit. But when you sunbake, you focus your attention on the sun. You position yourself. You pour your energy towards the sun.

You limit your other activities so that you can absorb as much as possible from the sun. And the result is you will get more from the sun. You'll get more red or brown. You'll get more warmth, more vitamin D.

Likewise, everything that God has established in terms of the rituals for Israel, the Sabbath gathering requirements, function as an opportunity for Israel to sunbake in His radiance.

to focus themselves on His holiness and His majesty and His power. Now He specified how it happens, when it happens, and everything that He specified in Leviticus.

You thought they were just random details about which material and what shape things should be. Every detail was supposed to focus them on Him. From the shape of utensils to who was up the front, everything was to focus on God Himself so that the result would be an encounter with God that transformed them, that progressively made them more holy.

[23 : 22] God is the active party and He has been the whole time. He's the only one who can sanctify people, who can wash them, who can make them holy, even in the Day of Atonement which God gave them instructions on how to do.

In the sacrifices, in the ritual, it's God who must cleanse the people. The goat's not getting it done. The rituals themselves don't guarantee God's action.

They can't achieve cleansing in and of themselves. They are absolutely dependent on God's decision, on God's power. God is the key.

And that's why every aspect of Israel's corporate worship was directed towards showing God's holiness, revealing His glory so that as they dwelt in that glorious presence, they would be changed progressively and they would be better equipped to be the priest nation they were supposed to be.

be glowing with His wonder and majesty and power so that the world around would look and see the sun that they were basking under.

[24 : 35] The corporate worship of Israel was the key means by which God would achieve the day-to-day holiness of His people. Time in His presence equipped them to live with Him during the week.

Now this side of Jesus, we've taken a big step forward when it comes to gathering as God's people. There's a lot less blood. We did have it in our mind to decorate the Leviticus backdrop with animal carcasses, but we thought better of it at the last minute.

We have come a long way when it comes to gathering as God's people. We've already reminded ourselves that we have confidence to enter the most holy place, the throne room of God, because of the blood of Jesus, who died once for all that we might be forgiven and cleansed.

But God still encourages us to gather. In fact, in Hebrews 10, just after telling us that we have confidence to enter the holy place, the writer goes on to say, therefore, don't stop meeting together.

God is present among His people by His Spirit all the time. Always present, and yet there still seems to be something unique about when we gather.

[25 : 53] Some unique opportunity for us as the gathered people around God's Word to encounter His presence in a special way. And in fact, that's the whole point of gathering.

That's why we bother doing this. So that you might encounter God among His people. So that you might see His glory, taste His glory, feel His glory, and then be transformed by it.

Is that what you're expecting when you came to church tonight? Is that what you were hoping for? When you walked in the doors, that you would get to encounter God's holiness and glory?

Were you expecting to come here and walk out different, transformed, because you'd encountered the living God? Or were you hoping for a service that finishes on time?

Good supper? Maybe a half-decent conversation? God gathers His people so that they might encounter Him and be transformed.

[27 : 13] Now, I think that our church, our tradition, we get nervous about some of this sort of language. Some people have misused ideas like experience when it comes to God.

And the point isn't that you come to church chasing an experience. The point is, you come to church chasing God. And that will be an experience when you encounter Him.

But what I'm trying to say here is, the goal for us gathering is not that you know that God loves you. The goal of us gathering is that you feel loved by God.

The goal is that you come here not to gather some new information, but that you taste and feel God's love.

That you know His holiness and His purity. That you get a vision of who this God is who has drawn you into a relationship with Him so that you walk out the door just busting with desire to love and serve that God for the rest of the week and the rest of your life and every day until He calls you home to be with Him.

[28 : 30] God has designed this to be your taste of heaven. However imperfectly we might execute it. God gathers His people so that they might encounter Him and be transformed and that's the key to growing in holiness.

Doesn't matter how many strategies you have, how self-disciplined you are, how many books you read, if you're going to grow to be more like Jesus, you need to spend time with Him.

And one of the key ways that you can do that is by gathering with His people. This matters because holiness is not a behavioral issue.

It's not an effort issue. It's not something you've got to try harder at if you're not doing it well. It's a heart issue. In the New Testament in Luke chapter 10 there's this story where a young man comes to Jesus and says, Rabbi, what must I do to be saved?

The end point of the story is that Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan and basically says to this guy, you've got to love your neighbor. which is exactly what Leviticus 19 said to Israel.

[29 : 54] But before Jesus gets into this story of the Good Samaritan, his first response to this guy is, keep the commandments. Now, undeterred by this response, not feeling shut down at all, the young man presses Jesus and says, all these I've kept since I was a boy.

He's like, yep, done. Box ticked. Now, you might be thinking he's just an idiot and doesn't know how bad he is and he's ignorant of his sinfulness but Jesus doesn't argue with him.

Jesus doesn't go, hey, you think you're holy but nah. He just kind of moves on and talks about loving your neighbor as the true fulfillment of the law.

Now, there's two things that we need to grab there. Firstly, it seems like it's possible to tick the box of keeping the law without actually being holy.

I mean, it's possible that this guy had done the, you know, only God, not lied, respected his parents, not given false testimony, not coveted, not committed adultery.

[31 : 07] It seems that you can actually tick the box of obedience, you can do the right actions but not actually be holy or honor God in the way that you're doing them which gives us a clue that that was never the point of the law in the first place.

If you can meet the standard and Jesus says, yep, not quite there, the law wasn't designed to get you there. That's the first thing. The second thing is it shows us what's missing.

For this guy, the missing element is his heart. Because the laws were there as a display, a revealing of God's character. The point of the law is not to give you boxes to tick or a bar to jump over.

That's why Jesus, when he gets to Matthew 5, going through a whole bunch of laws, sets up this pattern where he starts with, you've heard it said to the people long ago, you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

This is the box that this young guy was ticking. Yep, done. But Jesus continues. He says, but I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

[32 : 22] The point of the law wasn't to give you a baseline. It wasn't just to limit the act of physically ending someone's life. What it was communicating was that people and life matter to God.

And not just whether that life is alive or not, but the day-to-day experience of living and even anger flies in the face of a God who cares and cares for and values that individual.

God's grace and specifically his grace in atoning for sin, in offering forgiveness, transforms the law. Now when we come to it, we need to read it through the lens of Jesus.

We need to read it hearing Jesus' words, I have fulfilled it. Which isn't the same as deleting or cancelling. What he's done is explicitly put the law and the rules where they were supposed to be the whole time.

Not as a standard to be lived up to, but as a description of the heart of God. As a revelation of what matters to him.

[33 : 34] As an invitation to love what God loves. To care about what matters to him. And as an invitation to set our hearts apart for him.

That's the heart of what true and right worship of God looks like. That's real holiness. Not simple rule keeping or box ticking, but a heart that loves God.

A heart that loves what matters to God. It looks like treasuring Jesus. Living every minute of every day for him.

Not 65 minutes a week on a Sunday. But treasuring Jesus in the way you treat your family. Loving and treasuring him in the way you treat other commuters on your way to work or uni.

Loving and treasuring him in the way you eat your breakfast. Every moment lived consciously in the presence of the God of heaven and earth who gave his son so that you could live in his presence.

[34 : 51] what he requires is your heart. The very center of you. He's not keeping a scorebook of what you have and haven't done.

He wants your heart. The bit that drives your decisions. Your reactions. And laws can't change hearts.

Rules won't make you love. love. But time basking in the grace of God to you. Time spent focusing on how majestic and powerful and holy our God is.

Time spent with your eyes fixed on Jesus. That produces love. That produces a desire for holiness.

A desire for obedience. That produces the kind of security that means we can receive the law as a gift rather than carry it as a burden. We opened tonight reflecting on the relative appeal of a new brand of Christianity.

[36 : 02] Built around the concept of conceding on holiness, giving up and even affirming the presence of sin. And it does sound appealing.

But it just doesn't work. Because what it reflects is a complete misunderstanding of what God has done in Jesus and how secure that makes us.

I mean, it misses the whole point. God wants you to be holy for your sake. God wants you to be able to be with him.

That's the work he's doing in the life of a Christian. He's progressively making them holy in preparation for heaven. In preparation for completely uninhibited joy in his presence.

To reject the call to holiness, to reject the law like it doesn't matter, is to reject the invitation to live with God. To reject obedience and law as unimportant is to reject the grace that God has worked in sending Jesus to die so that you can be in his presence.

[37 : 19] The call to be holy is a call to pursue God. It's not a call to be good. It's a call to love God. God. So lack of holiness in your life, if you're not more like Jesus than you were 12 months ago or two years ago or 10 years ago, lack of holiness is not a behavioural issue that you need to fix with self-discipline or with guilt or with scolding yourself.

It's a heart issue. And so if you're not growing more like Jesus, the question you've got to ask is not have I been trying?

The question is am I pursuing God in my life? Am I getting myself into his presence? And if the answer is no, then the only place you can go to change that, to fix that, the only place you can go to have your heart reshaped and moulded and set on fire with love for God, is to bask in the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus who died and rose again so that we might know him.

Let's pray. Father God, we want to concede that laws are intimidating, that often we're known as hypocrites because we speak about how we're supposed to be but we don't back it up with how we live.

We want to thank you that our failures are completely covered by Jesus. We want to thank you that there is nothing that we could do that would undo what has already been done on the cross.

[39 : 17] And Father, we want to ask that you would help us to see you, to encounter you, to experience you in such a way that we would see the law as the gift that it is, that we would desire holiness not so that we could be good but so that we could be with you, so that we might enjoy your presence even in the mundane details of catching a train or eating a meal.

God, open our eyes to the invitation that sits behind the law, the invitation to be with you, to love you as you deserve.

Father, make us more like your sun. Shine on us in such a way that we glow so that the world around us might see the joy and peace and hope that is offered in you.

Father, thank you for gathering us tonight that we might sunbake in your radiance. Please reveal yourself to us tonight and don't let us walk out of this room the same.

Amen.