

Why Leviticus?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, we have declared it a mighty cross. One of the intriguing things about Scripture is that every time it talks about the cross of Jesus Christ, it always qualifies it. You do realize that untold numbers of people lost their life on a cross but in the book of Colossians, it calls it his cross because the cross of Jesus Christ was different than every other cross because the guilt and the shame and the sin that he bore on the cross was not his own but it was ours, and the fact that 2 Corinthians 5 is true, that he who knew no sin because sin on our behalf, that is a mighty cross where a man who was innocent can bear the eternal weight of all of the guilty. Guess what? The tomb is empty and as we just sang, one day he's coming back again in robes of white and we can celebrate that his righteousness has become ours because he took on our guilt and our shame.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of worship, the love, the mercy, the grace that we just sang about, it's unfathomable that in a world where it seems that each and every person is just out for themselves, who can get ahead, who can get more, who can outdo, that it was declared of you in Mark 10 that you came to serve and to give your life as a ransom for many. So Lord, today we kneel at your mighty cross and, Lord, we pray that as we open your word, that everything that we read and everything we discuss would be found in the shadow of your mighty cross. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I know many of you are with us as guests and visitors and I not only want to welcome you but I want to encourage you to become a part of something that we're doing as a family of faith, you can find it online, on the app, or even in paper form, but we as a family of faith are walking through the Scriptures in their totality over about a three year time period. Typically it's about a chapter a day, sometimes it's two chapters a day.

We began this about six months ago and I know that when we began there was an excitement that was building, but I also know that on that day when we began this journey, on that day that many of you got one of those reading journals and you began to prayerfully walk through the Scriptures chapter by chapter, I know that the overwhelming majority of you opened up immediately to the table of contents because you wanted to know when are we studying Leviticus? I can't wait to get to the book of Leviticus. For

those of you that are guests and visitors, I have the spiritual gift of sarcasm at times, but the book of Leviticus is what we know as the third book of the Bible. It is probably, and I can confidently say, the most unread, untaught, unpreached, uninteresting book in the entire Bible. We tend to avoid the book of Leviticus like we would some type of incurable disease and I believe there is reason for that. The first reason is for the first half of what we know as the book of Leviticus. If you've been a part of the plan this week, you realize that it's ritual after ritual, and you've got all these situations where they're bringing these offerings and these sacrifices and they're separating the kidneys from the fat, they're taking the blood and putting it in a certain place, and you read all that and say, "This has absolutely no relevance to my marital issues." I understand. You read that and say, "There is nothing in here that can relate to the struggles that our family is walking through." So at some level when we read through the book of Leviticus, all these religious rituals and rites, they appear, and we're gonna come full circle in a minute and see that it is not so, that they are irrelevant to everyday living. Once you get to the second half of the book of Leviticus, for those of you who have ever dared to do so, when you read the second half of the book of Leviticus, it is an incredible indictment on the depravity and the sinfulness of humanity. Every way that we could imagine rebelling against our Creator and our God is listed out in full detail. Some of y'all just got excited about reading the book of Leviticus. You say, "Hey, I didn't know that was in there." Oh yes, and so the first half appears to be irrelevant, the second half is this scathing expose on what's really found in our hearts and oftentimes displayed in our lives.

So today, I just want to answer a very simple question: why Leviticus? Not only why is it in the Scripture as we know it, but why should we read it? Why should we study it? Why is it important to our lives, particularly these next few weeks through our Bible reading plan? Why should we set aside time every day to walk through this section of the Scriptures?

Now as you turn to the book of Leviticus, we're gonna be primarily in chapters 4 and 5 but I do want you to, if you haven't opened, to look at the very first verse of the very first chapter. It says there in the first verse of the first chapter of what we know as the book of Leviticus that the Lord, he spoke unto Moses out of the tabernacle of the congregation. The book of Leviticus takes place between them coming out of bondage in Egypt to the point in which they will eventually get to what you and I know as the Promised Land, and what we discover in the book of Leviticus is the Lord communicating via Moses to the people of God what life should look like on the journey, and we discover throughout this book of the Bible that oftentimes is tedious at best, that the Lord has laid out some strategic things that you and I should grasp ahold of today and the first one is this. I want us to understand what is the purpose of what we know as the book of Leviticus. Why is this critical for our lives?

The first reason is this: there's an expectancy that we can have on behalf of our God. In other words, when we wake up every morning, there is something that we can fully expect the Lord to want to provide for our lives, and I've got news for you, it is not happiness or prosperity. When you wake up every morning, the first thing on the Lord's mind is not, "How can I make you happy today?" The first thing on the Lord's mind is,

"How can you live a life of holiness today?" I've got news for us all, the Lord is a whole lot more interested in our holiness than he is our happiness, and holiness means being distinct, it means being different, it means living a life that is clearly different from the rest in the total sum of society. In fact, in Leviticus 10:44, chapters 19, verse 2, there is this admonition, "Be holy for the Lord your God is holy." Now in this book of the Bible that oftentimes is neglected, the term holy or holiness is used 87 times. It's almost as if the Lord's using a spiritual 2x4 saying, "I'm trying to get your attention here. In your striving for happiness and contentment, I'm truly desiring holiness to take place."

The second aspect of this purpose is what I would call the extent of holiness. This is where chapter 4 and 5 comes into play. As you're walking through this first half, as I mentioned earlier, there are all these rites and rituals and religious expectations and such, but when you get to chapter 4 and chapter 5, there are two very specific offerings that the people were commissioned to make. The first one in chapter 4, and for those of you who have study Bibles or maybe those that have notes on the side or above the chapter headings and such, it will tell you that this is the section on the sin offering, and it's there in chapter 4 where they would make an offering to the Lord on behalf of that which they had done against him. In other words, things they had said, done, though, whatever it may be, if they had violated the Lord's commandment specifically toward him, they would make a sin offering.

Now if you turn the page to chapter 5, you will notice that the entire discussion whether it's labeled, you know, kind of at the front of the paragraph or you just kind of walk through it until you get to verse 5 and 6, we discover that it is a trespass offering. Now we understand that all sin is ultimately against God, we get that, but what we discover as far as the extent, as far as holiness is concerned, that the Lord desires for us to live a holy life in relationship to him but in chapter 5 the trespass offering was that which we'd done to violate somebody else. In other words, holiness is not something simply to be reserved for Sunday morning among other believers, in fact, I'd be willing to say the Lord may be more interested in your holiness on Monday and Tuesday than he is on Sunday. Can we just admit Sunday is an easy day for holiness, right? When everybody else is singing the same song? When everybody else is opening the same page of the Bible? When everybody else shows up with the same intent and the same desire? Then Monday morning comes and Tuesday, and by the time Thursday afternoon comes, you are slap wore out with people. But holiness is not just a Sunday morning construct, it is a 24 hour a day, 7 day, 365 expectancy that the Lord has for our lives. So the extent is not just in a single location, at a single time period, with a single group of people, it's at all times, among all people, in all places.

Then there's what I want to call the evidence. In fact, it's that latter half of the book of Leviticus, honestly beginning at about chapter 18, where there is this list and there is this discussion of all the different ways, all the different means, all the different concepts that humanity has conjured up to say, "We want to do it our way." You know, it's kind of frightening when you think about it because when Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, you know the famous story of the 10 Commandments, there are those famous 10 "Thou shalt not" typically, but when you look at the 10 Commandments in light of its historical

context, everything that was happening when Moses came down at the foot of the mountain with Aaron and the bull that was made out of gold, the Baal worship, and all the stuff that was happening, everything they were doing is what the Lord said they shouldn't do. When you read the book of Leviticus, it's like the 10 Commandments on steroids. I mean, you not only have the "big 10," you've got every shade and every form of every capacity. Some of you just got real interested and said, "Hm, this thing known as Leviticus might be interesting." In fact, I would dare say that as you begin reading particularly the last half of what we know as the book of Leviticus, it may be shocking to discover that some of the behavior that we see in our world today that we find so unfathomable, the Israelites were taking part in it thousands of years ago. Solomon is right, there is nothing new under the sun.

Which leads to the parameters of the book of Leviticus. All these offerings, all these sacrifices, all this discussion, this declaration that our lives should be rid of sin and should look like and be holy, and when I say the parameters, what I mean is how do we place ourselves under this understanding of how desperately sinful we are and how a lack of holiness we possess. I want to discuss three things of how we label sin in our lives and I want you to understand sin is sin. James 2:10 says if you've broken one of the laws, it's as if you've broken all of them. So do not read into or interpret today that I'm saying that there are some worse sins than others or different one than others, what I'm simply saying is there are different ways by which we go about our unholiness and our depravity.

The first one is what we call the sin of commission. The sin of commission is we know better and we do it anyway. We know what God said, we know what he expects of us, we know what the commandments are, we know what the admonition is and we simply look into the face of God and say, "I know what you expect of me and I'm not gonna do it." Now you're not alone in this struggle. That was what happened in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve looked at God and said, "Hey, we know what you said about the tree, we want to eat a different tree." This is what Abraham and Sarah did when it was discovered that they were struggling with the child of promise whom we would know as Isaac. They said, "Even though you said it should be us, we're gonna go out and find Hagar and we're gonna fix this for ourselves," and you see thousands of years later the consequences are still among us. How about King David? One night when he should have been at war, he was at home, he looks out in the moonlight and there is Bathsheba basking in the moonlight. He knew that adultery was wrong, he knew she was married to one of the generals of his army, and it didn't bother him at all. Not only did he participate with her but he had her husband killed.

Lest you think all the illustrations are in the Old Testament, we get to the book of Galatians 2 and a man who we know as Simon Peter, and I know there were times where he struggled with opening his mouth before he thought, but as a whole I think we'd all agree that he pretty well lived this life when he was following Jesus and particularly after the tomb was discovered to be empty, he was one of the first two that ran to the empty tomb yet the Lord told him that he was to be a light to the Jews. He was to stay there in Jerusalem and Judea and as one who was raised in Judaism, he was to be a part of all those things, and as we read in Romans 14, it says be careful when you're dealing with

someone who is weaker in their faith, you want to be more cautious in your life. In Galatians 2, there's a bunch of Gentile believers, people from our spiritual heritage, not with a Hebrew background, not with a synagogue background, and they're doing what we Gentiles do when we get together, they're having an all you can eat pork barbecue buffet. I mean, they're loving life. It looks like the ultimate tailgate party. I mean, it's right there. They're having a ball. Now they didn't have flat screen tvs and football, oh those poor people. Do you know how much they would love today's world? But nonetheless, they're having this large barbecue buffet, Peter shows up and he goes, "Well, you know, now I'm free to eat this stuff, it might be okay." He knew he was called to the Jews, he knew they were weak, he knew he wasn't to partake and what happens? Paul shows up, he's up to his elbows in barbecue sauce. He calls him out and says, "You knew better." Can we all admit we've done this at some level? And some of you are saying, "Hey, I do this on a regular basis." We know what God's commissioned us to do and we just say, "I don't want to do it. I'm gonna do something different."

Then there's what we call the sin of omission. James 4:17 says, "He who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." Classic biblical example, the story of what we know as the Good Samaritan. Here is a man who has been beaten, he's been robbed, he's been left for dead on the side on the road, and what happens? The priest and the Levite, the religious people, the ones who claimed to serve the one true God said, "I'm not gonna help a man who's down. I'm gonna actually walk on the other side." How does this play out in our lives? How many times has the Lord said, "I want you to go here," and you say, "I don't want to go there." "I want you to give here." "I don't want to give there." "I want you to serve here." "I don't want to serve there." The sin of commission is I know it's wrong, I'm gonna do it anyway. The sin of omission is I know it's right and I don't want to do it.

You see, when you read throughout the book of Leviticus, there are these parameters of that which we shouldn't do, we do, and that which we should, which we don't. Does that sound familiar, Romans 7, the Apostle Paul and I struggle with this too, but there's one other layer here in Leviticus 4 that I want you to see beginning at what we know as verse 13 and 14 and it says in verse 13 of Leviticus 4, "if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance." That's interesting. Turn to chapter 5, verses 17 and 18. You see, chapter 4 is the sin offerings, chapter 5 is the trespass offerings, verses 17 and 18, look at the very end of verse 18, he says, "they shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance." The book of Leviticus makes it very clear there are times we know we shouldn't and we do, there are times we know that we should and we don't, but then there are times of absolute ignorance.

Allow me to illustrate. I don't know if this has ever happened in your life but my wife will testify that this is unfortunately a regular occurrence in my life. There are times where I'm just minding my own business when all of a sudden I look in the rearview mirror and there are some beautiful blue lights flashing in my rearview mirror, and they pull me over and this has unfortunately taken place many times because I am a chronic compulsive speeder. I confess it. I admit it. I know who I am and I know what my struggle is. So oftentimes when whoever the law enforcement officer is, they'll come to

our window, when they say, "Do you know how fast you were going?" I know how fast I was going every time. I am very conscious of what I'm doing and I will tell them, "I was doing 58-59 miles per hour. What's wrong, officer?" "Did you know that this was a 35?" Oops, that's not gonna play out well, is it? And what's our typical response? "I didn't know."

Now I don't know if you've been in that boat before, but it happens. You think it's a 55 when it's really a 35, or you find yourself in one situation thinking it's another and what you do is you plead ignorance, and here's what law enforcement officers do, they say, "Well, Jeff, you know, I'm sorry that you didn't know it was a 35. We're just gonna forget this happened. Just go on home." That's not what they do. They say, "Well, I'm sorry that you didn't see the sign. Here's your date for your court appointment." You see, ignorance is not the lack of knowledge, it's the lack of paying attention and when it says that they committed the sin of ignorance, it's not like they were walking around going, "Well, we didn't know we weren't supposed to do that." No, it's they weren't paying attention to what God had said and we are so guilty of this because God has communicated 66 books of everything we need to know and how many times do we say, "But God, I didn't know"? He said, "I told you. It was in Romans. It was in 1 Corinthians. I even tucked some stuff away in Nahum just in case you're curious."

We stand guilty. This parameter, sometimes our sin isn't because we purposely rebel, sometimes it's not even that we just purposely say, "I'm not going there, guys," sometimes we say, "Do you know what? I don't want to find out where I stand on this and I'm just gonna see if I can play the ignorance card." You know that ignorance is not bliss, right? Not when it comes to the Lord.

So what does all this do? Well, the book of Leviticus gives us incredible word pictures, so to speak, and when you're in chapter 4, I want to begin to explore some of these word pictures beginning with a classification and I know that we live in a world today where everybody wants to put everybody in the same room and sing Kumbayah, but the Lord doesn't do that. In fact, in chapter 4, verse 3, he begins with saying, "If the priest that is anointed," he begins with addressing the priest and then if you'll either turn to or look down to verse 12 and it says, "the congregation that is gathered." Then you make your way to verse 21, I'm sorry, you make your way down to verse 22 and it says, "the rulers that are present." Then you go to verse 27 and it says, "and the common people." Now that's an interesting classification the Lord uses. He starts with priests, then he goes to the congregation, then he goes to rulers, then he goes to the common people.

Let me work that backwards for just a moment. The common people, that is the secular society and what he is saying is that even though you're not religious, even though you have no faith base for your life, you are still accountable to the God who formed, created, and sustains you and was willing to give his life from our perspective in Jesus Christ, for you. That's the secular world. You back it up one more and it's the rulers of the secular world. You do understand that our societies and our cultures basically do that which those rulers allow them to do, have given them parameters to participate in, and said, "This is valid and this is not." You say, "Well, why is that important to understand?"

Because if you back it up one more layer, you've got the congregation. Allow me to state something that needs to be said: as the church goes, so goes the world. You know how easy it is to throw the proverbial rocks at the stain-glassed windows of a lost heathen world? According to 1 Peter 4, judgment must begin at the house of God. How do we, how can we say, "Well, they ought to be living different lives," when we're living the same life? How can we say, "They shouldn't do that," when we in the church are doing the exact same thing? How dare we say, "They need to clean up their act," when we're just as dirty as they are?

So what you see the Lord laying out here is there is this classification that if holiness takes place here, it'll begin to penetrate the rest of the society which leads us to the first thing that was mentioned in chapter 4 and what I'm about to describe in chapter 4 is something that, you know, it may make some people offended but really the only person in the room who should be offended by what I'm about to say is me, so I can say it. Do you know why the congregation is unholy? Do you know why the church is unholy? Because the preachers are unholy, that's why, and I can say that. How many more stories do we have to read in the newspaper? How many more videos do we have to see of pastors being taken off in handcuffs because of the unholy lives they were living? I've got news for you, if the pastors are living unholy, the church is gonna live unholy. If the church lives unholy, the world is going to be unholy.

So together, you and I together, we have the opportunity to live distinct holy lives that will impact those that have authority as well as society as a whole. It's an incredible picture of how holiness penetrates a world. It begins with the pastors and the congregation, the body of believers living on Monday what we sing about on Sunday and it'll make a difference.

The second picture is the cure. How do we solve these issues that we see all around us? It's a word that's very graphic but all throughout the book of Leviticus, it's the word blood. In 66 verses, there are 88 references in the book of Leviticus to blood. My wife and I were talking last night, Tracy and I, about how life would look so differently if I was a pastor several thousand years ago during the times of Leviticus, because generally speaking, my days are consumed with hospitals and wedding and funeral preparations, answering people's questions, dealing with things, talking with folks, but if you read the first half of Leviticus, I would get up every morning and I would go down the camp and, you know, we'd take this sacrifice and we'd separate the kidneys from the fat, and we'd pull the blood out of here, and we'd apply it here. I would come home gross looking at night because I'd be covered in blood because everything offered, everything sacrificed had to have blood because Hebrews 10:22 is true, without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

You know, we live in a world today where everybody seems to have an answer for every problem we've got. There's a new plan, there's a new program, there's a new pill. But can I be completely transparent? Until we start applying the blood of Jesus Christ to these issues, don't expect any different behavior. Don't expect holiness. Don't expect change. You see, only through the person of Jesus Christ is sin eradicated. Only through the

person of Jesus Christ does holiness become possible in our lives which leads us to the last concept. There is what we know as this opportunity that goes before us. In fact, I would say it's a comparison.

Look in chapter 4, verse 12. Chapter 4, verse 12 talks about the congregation and their sins. It says they took the atonement and they went outside the camp. Verse 21 says the same thing, they went outside the camp. You say, "Well, why is that strategic?" When Hebrews 13:10-13, it says that when Jesus Christ bore our sins, he did so outside the camp. They took those offerings, they took those sacrifices and the blood that was saturated in it, they'd go outside of the camp to offer it. Why is this such an incredible picture for you and I? Because I think we talk about the cross of Jesus Christ, we sing about it as being mighty and powerful, and we talk about the nails in his hands and his feet, the crown of thorns, and we oftentimes give it a graphic account, but do you realize that when Jesus Christ went to Calvary's cross, that every sacrifice, every offering that's described in the book of Leviticus he was bearing on his cross. That for sin, iniquity, trespass, peace, meat offerings, etc., all of them.

So when we talk about the blood of Jesus Christ, yes, there was that literal flow of his blood that day on Mount Calvary but he also, he consumed in his sacrifice the totality of all of these sacrifices in one and aren't you grateful today that as he was held there on that cross, he made this three word declaration, "It is finished." The remission and the forgiveness of sins as pictured in the book of Leviticus foreshadowing the cross never comes with the sacrifice of bullocks and goats etc., it can only come through a perfect, blameless, without blemish sacrifice who we know as Jesus Christ. He said, "It is finished." So the question I ask in light of Leviticus is: then have you come to the end of yourself and ask him to do so.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today for whatever reason you find yourself in this context maybe for the very first time, maybe you've been in a context like this so many times you've lost count, but maybe today is that day where the proverbial light bulb came on and you realized that it's never gonna be about how much good you do or how much "bad" you stop doing, and you realize that if it's not for the shed blood of Jesus Christ, forgiveness, salvation, atonement is never gonna take place. Or maybe you're that person today, maybe you're in this room with us, maybe you're on the other side of the camera, maybe you're listening to the radio and such, can I just ask you if you're in that position, would you be willing to have a conversation with the Lord? The Bible says in Romans 10:13, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," and if that's what you desire today, the forgiveness of your sins, the salvation of your souls, would you have a conversation? Now you don't have to have a conversation out loud and, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words or phrases that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want you to know that I finally understand I'm the problem and Jesus Christ is the only answer. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sins on his cross. And I believe that three

days later he rose from the dead so that I could have the opportunity to be forgiven and to be saved not based on my merit but based on his sacrifice and resurrection. So God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if you had that conversation with the Lord today, we'd love to have a conversation with you. In just a moment after I pray, just a time to talk it out, to pray it out, and see what the Lord's doing in your life. Maybe you had that conversation years ago, some of you it's been decades, and maybe today was one of those days even through a book known as Leviticus, you realized that your Mondays and Tuesdays don't look a whole lot like your Sundays, and maybe there needs to be a change when you leave this place and this campus today. Whatever it is, we just pray that you would respond to whatever the Lord is doing in your life.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of worship, thank you for Christ. Thank you for mercy. God, thank you for second chances. Lord, I know there are many listening to my voice right now who have lost count of how many times they've fallen into the temptation of sin, wondering if there was ever a chance, if there was ever hope but, Lord, today you reached out of heaven with your hand of mercy and grace and said, "I'm willing to forgive. I'm willing to save." Lord, I pray that we would not take this opportunity for granted but we would embrace what you're doing in our lives. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as our team leads us, whatever decision I'm gonna be right here at the front.