

Be Holy, as I am Holy
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Thesis: The blood of Christ allows us to BE HOLY.

Leviticus 19:2

“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy.”

Good morning it is good to be here! I am not the person usually up here, I am Gabe, a resident here at the church, and I get the chance to be up here today, and I am excited. When Andy and I were figuring out what I was going to be speaking on today, we landed on the book of Leviticus. Which I mean for many people is where Bible reading plans go to die. I don't quite know how the resident got stuck with that one. If you're ever like me when it comes to reading the bible and picking which book to read sometimes it's like a dating show, like the bachelor but for books of the bible, we can be drawn to the popular books, the nice ones, with the great stories, and tend to avoid the old, weird, and short ones. So, if we are being honest Leviticus is an old and weird book but it has a nice personality. It can be a very hard book to read there are a lot of strange rules and practices and it doesn't always make sense, so it is easy to skip over. But I think the book as a whole, paints a beautiful picture that we can apply today. If you are new or are just checking faith out, this message is going to dive deep into scripture and be biblically detailed, but I think we can learn a lot from this.

Since we haven't been talking about Leviticus let me kind of catch you up to speed on where we are. The book is the third book of the Bible. It is the third book of the Torah; the Torah is the first five books of our bible, and it is the foundation for the faith of the Israelites. These first five books were so important most Jewish people in the time of Jesus would have them near memorized. It's interesting because this book is at the center of the Torah which shows its importance.

This book comes right after Exodus. So, the Israelites left their slavery in Egypt which we read about, and Moses led them to Mt. Sinai. This is the place

where he got the 10 commandments from God, then he comes back down the mountain only to find the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, then Moses sees this gets angry and breaks the tablets, and must write new ones. But at the very end of the book, we find that God wants to be among his people, and this is key. God wants to be among his people so they create the Tabernacle which is this big tent that God can dwell in so that he is with His people. However, we learn that not just anyone can enter into the presence of God, because of their sin they are unable to enter. So, Leviticus is addressing this issue. In the first verse of the book, it says that

God called to Moses FROM the tent of meeting.

The key word being FROM, meaning that God is set apart from his people still, even Moses isn't allowed in. The question this book answers is, how can the Israelites reconcile their sin and be with God? This leads us to around the center of the book where it says in

Leviticus 19:2: "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy.'"

Something that is crucial to understanding this book is understanding this word, Holy. The word Holy is sometimes hard to think about or understand today. It means to be, "Set Apart" or "Unique." God is above all things he is the creator of life, so he is Holy.

Tim Mackie and the Bible project describe God's Holiness like the sun. The sun gives life it is good, powerful, and unique. Even the area around the sun is intense and powerful. It provides light and energy, it keeps us warm, sometimes a little too warm. Without the sun we wouldn't be able to exist. It is a key element in the life cycle it is important. But being close to it is dangerous. I remember being in the 10th grade and going on a trip to the beach with my youth group. And this may clue you into what type of student I was. We go to the beach on a Monday, and everyone was so excited, and we played games and it was great. This was around our spring break time, so it was crazy hot or anything it was nice. So, we get there, and like any smart person, I put on my sunscreen before going out to the water and playing. And around a couple of hours go by and my friend says ok it's time to "reapply." And as a 10th grader, I decided I don't need to "reapply", and I proceeded to make fun of my friends who were. I didn't need more sunscreen; I was stronger than the sun. As time went on during the day friends told me I need to "reapply." We get to dinner time, and we are still at the beach and yet again the leaders told us we needed to "reapply." That night I

found out I wasn't stronger than the sun. I got the worst sunburn I've ever had; I was sick, borderline sun poisoning it was awful. The Sun is a very powerful thing. It is good and provides life, but unprepared and corruptible things are around it they get burned. Mackie describes the Holiness of God in a similar way. His Holiness is pure and powerful, and when things that aren't pure get close to it, they get destroyed. Not because His holiness is bad, but because it is so good that it is a threat to everything that isn't good. **So, Leviticus is discussing how we can live near God's holiness without getting burned.**

Back to our Israelites, we read in **Leviticus 19:2** it says: "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy.'"

The Israelites are called to be Holy. How are they to do that? The structure of the book gives us three answers to this question, "how are we to be holy?"

Like I said this book paints a picture so focus with me on this. The Book is broken into sections.

Chapters 1-7 and 23-25 talk about **Rituals**, this is sacrifices that the Israelites could do for different things, then also different feasts such as Passover, Pentecost, or many others.

Chapters 8-10 and 21-22 talk about the **Priests**, this is about who the priests are how they are ordained, and their qualifications.

Chapters 11-15 and 18-20 talk about **Purity**, this is ritual Purity and cleanliness, as well as moral purity about issues of caring for the poor, sex, and social justice.

Basically, things that set Israel apart from the world.

Our Israelites know they need to be Holy, and this is how they are going to do it.

Let's start with **Rituals**. – These can be quite strange for us. The book of Leviticus begins with this talk of sacrifices, and this is not something we do today. But back in this time of the 7th century BCE, it is very normal, everyone made sacrifices to whatever god they followed. It was a part of life for the whole world back then. When the Israelites made them, they made sacrifices to offer up their thanks to God for things He has done for them. We often today make sacrifices just not in the same way. We make sacrifices in time, money, and convenience to thank God for what he has done for us and we do that joyfully. Whether you give an offering, spend time here or in prayer with God, or go out of your way for others you are making a sacrifice. **2 Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under**

compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” But they also offer sacrifices to apologize for the things that they have done. This can be strange when we think about sacrificing animals, but we need to understand the context of these sacrifices. For an Israelite who has sinned, they have committed evil against God, however, God allows an animal to be the atonement for that sin. Atonement is also known as a covering. So, the Animal takes the person’s place. The sin of that person is symbolically put on the animal thereby covering the person. It’s like when our student minister Rob and I stop at Dunkin and I forget my wallet, he pays the price for me, he covers it. The idea is that this animal gives its blood for the Israelite’s, so the blood of this animal is life-giving. It’s a powerful symbol.

In the second part of the book, the Rituals talked about having to do with the sacred days and festivals in their faith. They are celebrations and festivals that celebrate, commemorate, and show how God acted in the story of Israel. This allows them to remember who God is and what he has done for them. Again, we have things like this today, it isn’t too hard to think; We have holidays like Christmas, Easter, or Good Friday that we can remember the things Jesus has done for us and we can remember that story. Not just holidays but being at church, and taking communion, or baptism, these are traditions that are keeping the story of the Lord on our hearts and minds.

I am a die-hard Tennessee Vols fan. I grew up in Knoxville, my room was painted bright orange as a kid which decreased our property value. I had Peyton Manning posters, my dream was to be the quarterback at the University of Tennessee, which I feel would have happened if you know it wasn’t for that knee injury in high school. No, I never played football very long, but I watched UT football games every time it came on. My dad and I would make a pilgrimage to Neyland at least once a year. I remember crying when they lost so I cried a lot. But I was overjoyed when they won. But one thing that played year-round in my house was Rocky Top. The best fight song in the land. Every sporting event watched came with Rocky Top, home sweet home to me. I loved that song. I still love that song. I know every word by heart. The lyrics were posted on the door frame in my room. And still, to this day when I hear it played, I get goosebumps. I think of Knoxville and all the people in orange yelling at gator and bama fans. I think back to sitting in the cold nights watching Tyler Bray throwing interception after interception. The song takes me back to good memories with friends and family watching the vols win. That’s the closest thing I can think of to a ritual

outside of the church for me. But that's what these festivals and celebrations are for the Jewish people.

So, if the Israelites do these rituals, they make all their sacrifices, they observe all the feasts and holidays then they will be Holy? Is this what makes us Holy? No, not exactly. That isn't what makes these Israelite people Holy. Nor is it what makes us Holy. Now do not misunderstand these are all good things the Israelites and us here today are doing but that is not what is making us Holy. Simply participating in these rituals, coming to church, or observing holidays, while they are all good things we ought to do, in fact, we are called to do them because it brings us closer to Jesus, but it is not what makes us Holy.

Well then for our Israelites let's go down the list. What about this idea of the **priesthood** can this be what makes us holy?

We move to chapters 8-10 and 21-22 where we learn more about this idea of the **Priesthood**. Yet another word that can be foreign to us. In Leviticus, we learn about Aaron and his sons as they are the ones who are ordained as these priests, and we see what it takes to be a priest they must be upright, clean, and moral. Priests are the people who go before God for the people and also go before the people on behalf of God. Chapter 10 tells us how important of a job these guys have. We see Aaron's two sons are priests in the Tabernacle and on their first day they deliberately don't follow instructions and they die; they are consumed by God's holiness.

So, while this concept of the priesthood gets our Israelites closer to the holiness we are looking for. It isn't what makes us holy. Their priests failed in the presence of God; our people are still kept at a distance. Hopefully, you are starting to root for the Israelites because this is a real dilemma on how to become holy. This can be hard to picture in our church today as we don't see many priests walking around. If we look in 1st Peter 2 in the New Testament it says this in verses 4-5: **"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."**

This is confusing. Peter calls believers to be a holy and royal **priesthood**. What does this mean? I am confident you will come to understand this more as

we continue but from the beginning, in creation God creates humans as priests, we are with God and represent on our own behalf for God. Then, Adam and Eve sinned so they are no longer priests and no longer in the holy presence of God. However, God promises there will be someone whom he sends to be our royal priest, and this person will extend that priesthood to all who believe.

But for right now our Israelites are still struggling, just because they are making sacrifices and keeping the holidays doesn't make them holy, nor does simply speaking through the priests on occasion. While the priests are holy, they are still prohibited from seeing God face to face.

What about the middle of the book; chapters 11-15 and 18-20 that talk about Purity? Is this the big thing that is going to make everyone holy?

What even is Purity? Purity is a weird word today. It comes with a lot of connotations, but it is defined as something that is clean or without contamination. So, Purity is clean, and Impurity is unclean. In Leviticus, God represents purity he is perfect. Because he is holy and pure, those in his presence need to be holy and pure or as we commonly see it called, "clean". If you are pure, you can be around God, if you are impure, you cannot.

For the Israelites in chapters 11-15 of Leviticus, we learn about ritual purity. So, there are things the Jewish people cannot physically be around because it is unclean. We see a list of animals that the Israelites are not to come into contact with or they will become unclean. Then not encountering these animals will set them apart from the people of the world. So not only is it keeping them safe it is a reminder that God is above every part of their life. There are things about diseases, dead bodies, fungus or mold, and bodily fluids, and these are things that will lead the Israelites to death and not life so that is why they are important. Coming into contact with these things makes an Israelite unclean. But this is very important, being ritually unclean or impure was not the issue here. Touching dead bodies, disease, mold, fungus, animals, and bodily fluids, was all a part of life. But impurity in this sense is not meant to last forever, you can be cleaned and there are ways outlined to do that. So just coming into contact with those things wasn't what was bad, what was bad was not becoming clean and going into the presence of God when you were unclean. This is something we may often forget about today. Sometimes when we read the Old Testament, we see God more as hard and judging and forget about his love and mercy. God cares for us so much that he, like my friends and leaders in 10th grade, may even ask us to reapply. In these

laws, God is providing a way back for the Israelites. When the Israelites came into contact with these things, they simply needed to go through the cleaning process. These are things that we don't see in our culture today because Jesus has already covered these rituals.

In chapters 18-20, we learn about Israel's moral **Purity**. This is different from the ritual purity we just learned about. These are meant to make the Israelite people morally pure and make them stand out from the world. The Canaanites did not love the poor, they had poor sexual integrity, and they had no social justice. So, the Israelites are called here to live differently than them, this not only protects them but sets them apart. The purpose of these laws for the Israelites is to protect them, set them apart, and lead them to life. The idea is that God is the author of life, and he is steering us away from death.

This must be it! If the Israelites stay pure and clean, then they will be Holy! Leviticus 18:5 **"Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord."** It's a must to live a life of obedience. Deuteronomy 5:33 famously says, **"Walk in all the ways the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."** Is this what is making us holy? But we know it's not always that easy. Do not get me wrong it's important to live a life of obedience God wants the best for us and he calls us to that to make everything better for us, he is protecting us, setting us apart, loving us through these commands just as a loving father would. In fact, the first half of **Lev 26** describes the rewards for the Jews for obeying all that God has commanded. Moses tells them in verse 4 they will have a plentiful harvest, in verse 6 they will have peace, in verse 9 they will be looked at with favor and increase in number.

But for our Israelites, they can do their best to keep all of these laws, be completely moral, stay clean, and never risk being impure BUT they will fail. I think we are very similar in this.

Many times, we look at this idea of purity and sin and we say if we just can stay clean that is what will save us. It's a very individual idea that I myself fall into, that I am strong enough if I just pull myself up by my bootstraps, I can do good and be good, I won't do wrong, I'll do what God tells me, I won't sin... until I do. I can go to church and seemingly do everything right; I say I love you God I will never sin... and then I do. Then I get angry at a person I've never met, then I talk about people behind their back, then I break someone's trust, or I put my faith in

something else and I turn against what God has for me. See the issue here is as the church we can get up here and tell people to not sin all day long... but it's not that simple.

How are we supposed to be Holy? In the second half of Leviticus 19:2, it says "Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy." There is one more section we missed in Leviticus; I didn't put it up on the screen maybe some of you caught it. In Leviticus chapters 16-17 right in the center of the book there is something very important. It is also in the center of the Jewish texts and that is no coincidence. It's called the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement was a special day for the Israelites see, it's impossible to cover every single sin with normal sacrifices, there are too many that would slip through the cracks. So, the Day of Atonement was there to fix that. Once a year the High priest would take two goats, not two goats like Michael Jordan and Tom Brady, but real goats like the animals. The High priest would sacrifice one goat as a purification offering to make everyone clean, this goat would be innocent, it would have been blameless. The other goat was called a scapegoat, that's a word we know and use today. But what would happen is the Priest would confess all the sins of Israel onto this goat and then they would end the goat out into the wilderness. This was an image of all the sin leaving God's people never to return, the sin is being taken out almost like it is garbage. So, the blood of this first goat covers or atones for all of the sins. It's important to remember that the image of blood was a symbol for life, it was viewed as the life source of a being, so this life is being poured out to all. The punishment of sin is being received by this goat, so the people don't have to receive it. And the other goat, the scapegoat takes the sin away never to be seen.

This is a really cool picture but looking at it today is almost barbaric, making sacrifices and blood and everything. It's important to realize that making sacrifices were common this time. Every person would make sacrifices to whatever God they needed something from. However, sacrifices to other gods would have little purpose, they may work they may not, and the gods they worshipped didn't seem to care. So that's where the God of Israel is so different. His sacrifices had a clear purpose, and while God is not happy with human corruption, he loves humans so he gives them a way back to him, that is Leviticus where Israel can know for sure

that they are forgiven. This Day of Atonement allows people to be among God's presence.

So, yay for our Israelites we have found a way to make them holy, to set them apart, on this day of atonement. And a cool thing to let you know it works, Leviticus 1:1 at the beginning of the book it says, "The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him FROM the tent of meeting" but when we look at the first verse of the next book Numbers verse 1:1 says, "The Lord spoke to Moses IN the tent of meeting." This is intentional in showing that God is among the people whom he loves.

What about us? We no longer have animal sacrifices, or at least I hope you don't. How can we become Holy, if it's not through rituals or our purity, we don't interact with priests or anything, how can we become Holy?

The prophet Isaiah speaks of this new king who will be from the line of David and who will come to save us from evil. Isaiah 53 talks a lot about it, so I encourage you to read that, but I want to read verses 4-5, "Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds, we are healed." This king would be a servant, one who would suffer and die for the evil his own people committed. He would be a sacrifice. We learn that he would not just be a sacrifice he would be a royal priest who would intervene with God on our behalf and speak to us on His. Mark 10:45 describes Jesus as a Ransom or Atonement. As it reads, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 24: 46-47 confirms this as Jesus told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

It is Jesus who dies to atone for our sin, it is his life-giving blood that provides this purification to us. When he died the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom showing that God is now among his people, and not only that but Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because he didn't just die and take our sin to the grave in his burial, but he rose from the dead conquering death. It is because of this that the rituals we do connect us to him. Jesus blesses us with his spirit so the

same God who dwelled in the temple dwelled in us and now as we read in 2nd Peter, we are our own royal **priesthood** we commune with God ourselves. We are restored to this Holy calling through Jesus. Jesus through his blood makes us **pure** and holy. He fulfills this day of atonement and sacrifice.

We are a set apart Holy people. God dwells in us, HE is for us, He loves us, and He gives us a way back to Him even when we sin. As Holy people, God will never leave us, He has a plan for us, and He will do great things through us. That is why it is so important for us to understand this.

If you get anything out of this, please get this. It doesn't matter what you've done, who you are. It's not what church attendance looks like. It's not the good deeds you've done. It's none of that. **It's the blood of Christ that allows us to BE HOLY.** (leave slide up until last paragraph)

You may say well you don't know what I've done, you don't know who I am. I am impure, the things I've done hurt others, what I've been a part of it's horrible. I lie every day, I don't trust the people around me, and I fail God all the time. No one loves me, no one cares about me, and I will never be good enough. You tell me to be clean and Holy that's not me. But I tell you, you are not alone. **It's the blood of Christ that allows us to BE HOLY.** Nothing else, nothing else will work. This life-giving blood reaches out to all of us, and it sets us apart, makes us holy, and God dwells in us.

Friends, sometimes I don't believe this message. But it's true. God resided among his people then and he resides among his people now and that's the beautiful picture painted in Leviticus. Let's Pray.