

# mp3/728/MZ000045.MP3

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 February 2019

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     to 18. Just to put you in the picture, Acts 10 was when Peter was called to go to the house of Cornelius, the Roman soldier, and to share the gospel with him, and people were converted, and now he's being asked to explain what happened, why he went, and what was God doing in it all.

So Acts 11, page 1105, beginning at verse 1. The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, you went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them. Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story. I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision.

I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, get up Peter, kill and eat.

I replied, surely not, Lord. Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth. The voice spoke from heaven a second time. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.

This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. Right then, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.

[ 1 : 4 9 ]     The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered a man's house. He told us how he'd seen an angel appear in his house and say, send to Joppa for Simon, who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So if God gave them the same gift he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Who was I to think that I could stand in God's way? When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, so then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.

I wonder if you're a great fan of medical documentaries. Would you like to watch those programs, 24 hours in A&E; and hospital and others as well? I don't like them. I don't like them because I'm squeamish. I can't look at those operations where they cut open various people's organs and bring them out and look at them and sew them up. I'm a bit squeamish when it comes to that.

But I'm sure if you watch those programs and even some of the soaps, as it were, like *Holby City* and so on, then you'll know that before an operation, all the instruments that are going to be used in the operation and, of course, the surgeon and the nurses, everything has to be sterilized, has to be cleansed and cleaned to make sure that there can be no infection being passed on to the patient and therefore causing possibly even death. What may be a surprise to you is that the necessity of such cleanliness in surgery is a fairly recent discovery. It's not long, over 100 years ago, that it became common practice for surgeons and their equipment to be decontaminated. Before that, it was sort of went from one to another, covered in blood and all sorts of gory things like that, and many, many people died from that cross-contamination. That simple act, in one sense, of making the unclean clean is the difference that is between life and death. God divides all of life and everything in the world, animals, food, clothes, people, between those that are clean and those that are unclean. Of course, this is particularly in the Old Testament. The book of Leviticus has the most comprehensive list of laws about clean and unclean. Just here in Leviticus chapter 10 verse 9, so that you can distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and so you can teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses. Now, why am I raising this subject of clean and unclean this evening? Well, it really came out of the passage that we looked at this morning in Luke and chapter 8. I didn't make much of it, but those of you who were here this morning know that we were looking at this wonderful miracle of Jesus where he healed the woman who had this bleed, and we know what we mean by that.

Those of you who are adults here will know what we mean by that, bleed, and also this young girl of 12 who had died. And I mentioned very briefly as I was preaching through that, that this woman with the bleed was not just uncomfortable and painful and all the other things that must have gone along with it, but also she would have been ceremonially unclean. She wouldn't have been able to take the Passover meal and engage in the worship of God. She would have been somewhat ostracized by that debilitating illness.

And the reality is this, that according to God's law, both this woman and in fact the young girl would have been counted as unclean by the law-abiding Jews of Jesus' day.

[ 6 : 23 ] Okay, so Leviticus 15 and verse 25, which has a great deal to talk about, as it were, discharges of the body, fluids from the body. But in verse 25, a woman has a, when a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period, or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. So for this woman, 12 years, she was counted unclean. And again, for a dead body, was considered by God to be unclean as well. Numbers chapter 19 and verse 11, whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. And so therefore, when we think about those two miracles of Jesus, Jesus, we recognize that according to the law, each one of them made him unclean according to the law.

When he was touched by the woman who herself was unclean, he was contaminated. And when he touched the young girl and took her by the hand, which he didn't have to do, of course, remember, he went to Lazarus and brought him out with just a word, but he touched her, he was also becoming ceremonially unclean.

But the wonderful thing, of course, is that in both those occasions, Jesus not only heals the woman and the girl, but changes them from being unclean to clean.

The woman then was able to be restored in her relationship with God. She was able to partake of all the sacrifices, able to be able to go to the temple and the Passover and so on.

And that which was unclean had become clean. So I want to think, it just made me think, I was going to preach on that more in the morning, but then as I was preparing, I felt that the theme that I preached this morning was more appropriate. But I want us to pick that up. I think it's important, I think for many of us, there can be, rightly, as we read the Old Testament, something of a confusion. Why on earth have we got all these laws about clean and unclean? Some of them seem so nonsensical and unnecessary.

[ 8 : 41 ] Why are they there? What are they for? And especially, what has Jesus done to change that? What does it mean when the Bible tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin?

And why don't we keep those laws today? Some people have argued falsely, foolishly, that if we hold to the laws of the Old Testament, i.e. particularly those commandments which teach that same-sex relationships are wrong and sinful, then we should also hold to the laws of the Old Testament that tell us that eating shellfish is wrong and sinful. There's a complete foolishness in that.

But there may be confusion for us in that as well. And I want us to think about the reasons why God gives these laws in the Old Testament. Why are they there? Are they purely just some national thing?

Are they really nonsensical and purposeless? No, I don't believe that they are. Now, of course, some people would say, with a human head-on, they would say, well, of course, these laws are about hygiene. They help contain diseases from spreading, and there's a certain element of truth to that, especially when there is quite a lot of teaching on the matter of what we might call skin diseases. Leprosy and the like. Many chapters, chapters 13 and 14 in Leviticus have to deal with that. And in those chapters, the priests, who really were the ones who examined whether something was unclean or clean, were given some commands that they were to isolate those who had certain rashes and diseases. I have there in Leviticus 13.

It is a chronic skin disease. The priest shall pronounce them unclean. He is to isolate them because they are unclean. Sorry, that's the wrong verse, but there is some teaching on that there.

[ 10 : 50 ] But likewise, as well, there were certain laws about clean and unclean to do with the loss of fluids from the body, not just for ladies, but for men as well. In Leviticus 11, anyone the man with a discharge touches without rinsing his hands with water must wash their clothes and bathe with water.

They will be unclean till evening. Not just blood, but other unpleasant sort of fluids that could be leaked from the body. If somebody was unwell, whether from the mouth or from other places, well, if those things were left uncleansed, then they could spread diseases, couldn't they?

Germs and so on. Now, we know, of course, that it wasn't until the 19th century, people like Pasteur, Louis Pasteur and others actually discovered that there were such things as germs and bacteria, which actually were the cause for contamination and the spreading of diseases.

It would seem that when we read through God's word here, there is indeed some clarity that God sees and knew these things and wisely gave some of these laws for that purpose. God even gives commands about if you've got mold growing on your wall or damp, about how to deal with that to make sure that it doesn't spread to the rest of your house or to other people's houses and even in your fabrics as well.

There is some sense in that. But that isn't the whole purpose or reason or even the real reason. Then, of course, we come across these strange laws regarding clean and unclean animals, whether we can eat their meat or not.

[ 12 : 29 ] So we have this long list once more about fish, which fish you can eat, some with scales you can, without scales you can't.

Insects, depending on the number of legs they've got, animals on the type of feet they've got and what they eat, reptiles and so on. And God divides them between clean and clean. And that distinction between clean and unclean animals actually goes before the law, goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 7 when Noah was preparing the ark. He was told about the sorts of, or the numbers rather, of clean and unclean animals.

Genesis 7 verse 2, Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and so on.

Are these laws, were they based on hygiene as well? It doesn't seem to be. Yet some of those foods which were forbidden might cause an allergic reaction, i.e. if you're allergic to shellfish or other particular types of seafood.

But there's no reason to think that God commanded these things purely for health reasons. The Gentiles around, the nations around, ate pork and pigs and all the other things that were considered unclean.

[ 13 : 54 ] And they didn't seem to suffer any ill effects. I'm sure all of us, some particularly I'm looking at, enjoy a bacon sandwich. And it doesn't seem to have too much adverse effect, perhaps around the midriff, if we might say.

What was God doing? Perhaps we're meant to understand something more from this. God was making a distinction between his people and the rest of the nations.

He was showing them that they were different. He was seeking to instill into their mindset that they were different to everybody else. And that difference not only was to do with their worship of God and their relationship with God and therefore the sacrifices and the temple and who he was, but also was to, in one sense, permeate every part of their lives, even down to the everyday things of what clothes they should wear and of what food they should eat.

They were to see themselves as a holy nation, a nation set apart from other nations. And in what sense? That is, the sense of clean and unclean.

The keeping of these laws would be a daily reminder that they belonged to God and were under his command. Listen to what God says in Leviticus in chapter 18.

[ 15 : 17 ] It's about one particular aspect of clean and unclean, but it pertains to all of them. 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.

You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.

There's a distinction being made. And really that ultimately brings us to the real reason why God gave these commands. The real reason that God gave such details.

And so much of his word is taken up with what seem to be superfluous things. God is declaring himself to be holy. And his people were to be likewise holy.

[ 16 : 24 ] Leviticus 10 and verse 3. Moses spoke to Aaron. This is what the Lord spoke of when he said, Among those who approach me, I will be proved holy in the sight of all the people.

The people of God were to be a holy people. A set-apart people. An extraordinary people.

As we learn later on in the New Testament, a peculiar people. The sad truth is, though, that those clean people of God that he saved and rescued from Egypt, that he set apart, became unclean again when they sinned in his sight.

In Lamentations in chapter 1 and verse 8, there's a grieving going on by Jeremiah. Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. And so in one sense, what God is saying in his laws is there is that which is pleasing to him and that which is not.

There is that which is good and that which is bad. There is that which is holy and that which is sinful. God was showing them that there has to be a distinction. We cannot treat everything the same.

[ 17 : 41 ] The world is not a neutral place. Now again, intrinsically in and of themselves, those animals were not sinful. Of course they weren't.

But God was showing to them that there is that which is sinful and that which is holy. That's why God gave them the sacrificial laws, didn't he?

Those laws which were to provide for the cleansing from sin. Leviticus 15, verses 13 to 16. Offerings had to be made when people were declared unclean.

Differing stages of uncleanness. Notice Leviticus 15, verses 13 to 16. Let me read that to you. It's again, this time about a man who has had some fluid loss, as it were.

When a man is cleansed from his discharge, he's to count seven days for his ceremonial cleansing. He must wash his clothes, bathe himself with fresh water and he will be clean.

[ 18 : 40 ] On the eighth day, he must take two doves or two young pigeons, come before the Lord to the entrance to the tent of meeting and give them to the priest. The priest is to sacrifice them, the one for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering.

This way he will make atonement before the Lord for the man because of his discharge. Notice that phrase there. The priest is to sacrifice them, one for a sin offering.

This man had had some illness or some disease or something that had created this problem. It wasn't because he had physically sinned against God or in his heart sinned against God.

But it was a sin offering nonetheless that was needed. Uncleanness separates us from God. Don't hear the phrase very much and I'm not sure whether it's all together right anyway.

Cleanliness is next to godliness. I don't think that's necessarily true, is it? You can be very godly and still a bit smelly, can't you?

[ 19 : 42 ] But that was, I think, the Victorian way of looking at things, wasn't it? But uncleanness points us to our hearts, points us to our nature.

Our nature is a sinful nature. It's a fallen nature. It's not, we are not sinners because of the things that we do. We are sinners because of who we are, what we are.

Descendants of Adam and Eve. Inheritors of a sinful nature. God was indeed showing the people that they needed to be cleansed from their sin.

And cleanness meant a person was cut off from the community. It may have just been for a day. It may have just been for a week. It may have just been for a month. But for some it may be always, forever.

No one is clean enough to enter the presence of God as they are. All of us are contaminated and unclean.

[ 20 : 46 ] And something has to be done to cleanse us from that sin. So that we can enjoy the nearness of God. And so we come then to Jesus.

We come to the New Testament. We come to the reason why our Lord Jesus came into this world. And we come especially to why he took on our humanity. Hebrews, of course, as you know, is a book which has so much that points back to the Old Testament laws and ceremonies.

And speaks in the language of those things. And it speaks very much about the need of holiness. Here's what it tells us about Jesus. Hebrews 2 verse 11.

The incarnation. The incarnation. The incarnation. The incarnation. The incarnation. The incarnation.

The taking of Jesus. The Son of God. Of a human nature. A sinless human nature. Has to be said. But a human nature nonetheless. Was that so that he should make us holy.

[ 21 : 50 ] He should cleanse us from all our sin. Make us acceptable. Clean in the sight of God. I mean, no, of course, the way that he did that specifically was through his sacrifice of himself upon the cross.

Hebrews 10 verse 10. We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. Now, that is why we do not keep the Old Testament commandments concerning clean and unclean food.

That is why it is not a sin to eat a bacon sandwich unless you are in Weight Watchers where they count the sins. And you are only allowed so many.

It is not that God no longer cares about holiness. It is not that God in one sense turns a blind eye to sin. It is not that God does not see our hearts. But rather that in Christ Jesus we are cleansed of all of our sins.

We are holy in God's sight constantly and eternally. Hebrews 10 verse 18. Where these, that's the sins and acts I'll remember no more.

[ 23 : 00 ] Where these have been forgiven. Sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. We do not need to bring a pigeon or a dove or a lamb to sacrifice for our sins. We do not need the purification of the priest.

We've received it all in Jesus Christ. We are purified and cleansed from our sin because of him. So is there nothing that we can glean from these Old Testament laws of relevance to us today?

Are we better just to ignore them? No point reading Leviticus now he said. Now that we know that these things are no longer necessary because of what Jesus has done. But you'll be wrong dear friends to think that.

Remember that God gave those laws to impress upon the people the importance of holiness. The importance of purity. The importance of living a life that shows that you belong to the Lord God.

And are different from the world around about you. That is still the need today. If God was so concerned for the purity of his people then. We shouldn't be surprised that he is concerned for the purity of his people still today.

[ 24 : 11 ] Again and again we find throughout the New Testament. Commands to turn away from immorality. Have nothing to do with the things of this world.

We're told that we're saved from the world. We're no longer part of the world. We're to be different. And all the New Testament epistles speak about these things. Our language is different. Our habits are different.

Our lifestyle is different. Our goals are different. We are a completely different people. Why? Because we belong to God. We are a holy people.

We have those commands particularly that we are not to love the things of this world. We're not to be those who seek after or conform to the patterns of this world.

But rather be transformed says Paul in Romans chapter 12. Just want to close with these few thoughts then. How can we seek after purity today?

[ 25 : 09 ] How can we seek to be men and women of cleanness in an unclean world? Remember Isaiah when he prayed and he met with God and he saw God in Isaiah 6. He said oh God I'm undone because I'm an unclean man living amongst unclean people or people with unclean lips.

We're like that aren't we? We are cross contaminated by the world around about us. It's waves of thinking and acting and speaking pressing upon us. The challenge is to be holy people.

We know that we are holy before God. There's nothing can change that dear friends. You are accepted. You are forgiven. You are righteous in the sight of God because of what Christ has done for you.

But the living out of holiness is sanctification. That's a different thing. We can become unclean people. We can be spoiled and blemished and corrupted by the world around about us.

By the sinfulness of our own hearts. So I just close with these thoughts. One. We need to be aware. We need to acknowledge that we are cleansed by Christ's blood.

[ 26 : 20 ] And that must have a way. It must affect our way of thinking. We are cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's that wonderful passage there in Hebrews.

And chapter, I think it's chapter 9. Hebrews 9. How much more then will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God.

Cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death. So that we may serve the living God. Do we remember daily? Perhaps we need to remember daily by actually confessing our sin.

Lord, thank you that you forgive me. I know that I have sinned. Forgive me. Cleanse me from my sin. Let it not have a place in my heart when I realize how much Jesus did for me. Surely it means that we need to cultivate a hatred of sin.

The world in which we live, of course, is cultivating a coziness with sin. Making sin and sin much more acceptable, palatable. It's being thrust upon us on the TV.

[ 27 : 33 ] Not just in television programs and advertising and everything. Thrust upon us. Dear friends, we need to, in one sense, in the old saying, hate the sin and love the sinner.

Have I really got a hatred of sin? Or do I actually find it titillating? A little bit exciting. Risky.

Living on the edge. We are to hate that which is impure and unclean. We are to be holy as God is holy. That means two-sided holiness in God, isn't it?

In the holiness of God, there's the perfection of his nature. There's the beauty of his loveliness. There's the absolute sinless spotlessness of who he is. But as part of God's holiness, there's a hatred of sin, isn't there?

An unwilling to look upon unrighteousness. That needs to be cultivated in our own hearts and lives. Surely that comes from spending time with God's people. It spends time in the Word.

[ 28 : 35 ] We must seek after what is pure. It's that lovely command in Paul in Philippians as he brings his letter to a close. Philippians chapter 4 verse 8.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable. If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think on such things.

What is it that I'm allowing into my mind? Things we can't help at times, but there needs to be a guarding, doesn't there, of our minds and a seeking after. Seeking after holiness.

A seeking after, setting our minds upon what is lovely and pure. We've been called to be a holy people.

Called to be a different people. A Christ-like people. A people that show the power of Christ's cleansing in our lives. Both that woman and that girl that we thought about this morning.

[ 29 : 39 ] They were changed from being unclean to clean, but their lives were transformed, weren't they? The woman who no longer had that issue of blood.

The girl who was no longer dead. The people could see, they could recognize this was the work of God. Challenge to me, dear friends.

And the challenge to you is the same challenge. Does my life show that I've been cleansed of my sin? Does it show that I'm living a life which seeks after holiness?

Am I living out the reality of who I am? See, holiness, as we've seen, is not something we have to add to ourselves or make ourselves.

We are holy. We are cleansed of sin. We are right with God. It's now being who we are in life. Let's pray together.

[ 30 : 37 ] Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.