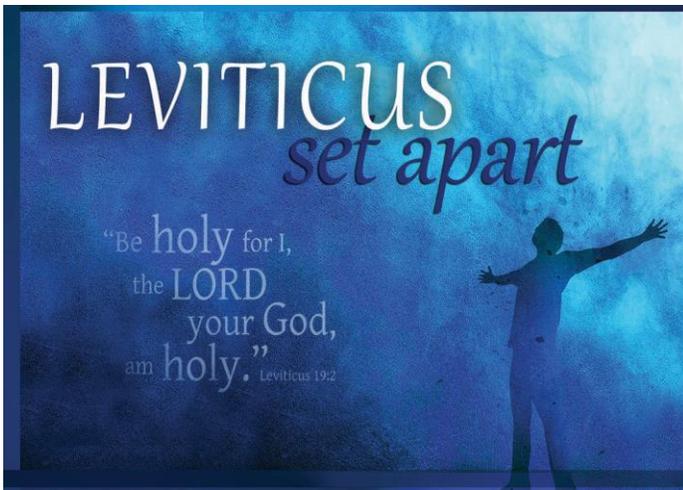


Be Holy for I AM Holy
Selected Passages from Leviticus
Old Testament Sermon Series on Leviticus
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
September 6, 2015

TEXTS: Leviticus 1:1-4; 9:7; 10:3; 11:44-45; 18:1-4; 19:1-2; 20:7-8; 20:26; 26:3-13

We begin a new series this fall as we turn our attention to the Word of God in Leviticus. I want to remind you of the great redemptive narrative of Scripture into which we enter when we read



the Book of Leviticus. Two years ago, we explored the Book of Genesis together where we read vast, sweeping narratives of God who builds a family of faith and cultivates generations to know Him and promises that through Abraham’s family He will bring blessing to all peoples of the earth. Last fall, we continued God’s redeeming purpose as we looked at the epic, confrontational redemption that happened at the crossing of the sea in

Exodus, where God redeems His people with a mighty, outstretched arm. You may be the kind of person that responds well to this grand sweeping narrative like Genesis. You may be the kind of person that just likes a great battle, and so Exodus thrills your heart. When we reach the Book of Leviticus, though, time slows down. The book of Exodus led to worship. The summons in Exodus was: “Let My people go so that they may worship Me.” Exodus is not about freedom in the abstract, but Exodus is about being set free from the oppressive powers of this world into the glorious freedom of the children of God to worship Him. The ending of Exodus is the scene of worship where the tabernacle was set up at the base of the mountain. God had spoken to His people on Mount Sinai, and the tabernacle was set up, just like Mount Sinai laid on its side: God’s dwelling in the midst of the people. The Book of Exodus ends with the tabernacle set up and the glory of God filling the Tent of Meeting. It is from this place that we open the Book of Leviticus, and we find God speaking from this tent.

In Leviticus, time slows down. There is no sweeping narrative; there is no epic redemption. It is an intimate conversation between God and His people. We will not leave this scene of the Tent of Meeting for the entire Book of Leviticus and all the way through to Numbers, chapter 10. This scene of resting in God's presence and God's speaking His will to us and calling to us is the subject of Leviticus. If you think of your life and the really important moments that mattered, those moments often take place in times of intimacy, in times of close communication. Leviticus is an extended conversation where God is speaking directly to us, calling to us. We will be able to push a movement of history behind us, and we will listen to the voice of the Lord God Almighty calling. That is how Leviticus begins.

Leviticus begins with the Lord's calling to Moses from the Tent of Meeting. The Lord speaks; the Lord calls; the Lord beckons him in and speaks. Throughout this Book of Leviticus, God's call is the same, repeated eight times in the narrative. God's central calling to us is: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Leviticus is about an imitation of the glory of God in our lives. We confront a number of communication challenges in Leviticus. I know many people who have committed with high resolve to read through the Bible, and they make it through Genesis with joy. They make it through Exodus with joy. I've known a few people, maybe one or two, that have reached a theological sandbar when they come to the Book of Leviticus, and they feel unsure, they lose their bearings. No one told them that this is an intimate conversation with the Lord God Almighty and what its central theme is. I recognize this, and I want to be sympathetic to it, and yet I want to tell you right up front that the Book of Leviticus is absolutely thrilling. Once you penetrate it, once you yield to God's instructions, it is absolutely thrilling. It is no accident that Jesus summarizes the whole will of God for us with a quotation from Leviticus. It is no accident that when we pray the Lord's prayer, the first thing Jesus Christ teaches us to pray for flows right out of Leviticus: *Hallowed be Thy name*. This is a prayer that the name of God would be holy, would be revered in the world, and it echoes this calling that we hear in Leviticus. Eight times in the narrative we are told: "Be holy, for I am holy." We are then confronted with an immediate question of what is holiness. In the Bible, God is described as the Holy One of Israel. In Isaiah 6:3, the song of the seraphim rises up in heavenly worship:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

When we see the worship of heaven, we likewise hear the heavenly court singing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Holiness refers to the infinite perfection and beauty of the Lord. Psalm 96:9 says:

"Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth!"

In Psalm 29:2, we read:

“Ascribe unto the LORD the glory due unto His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

A. W. Tozer says:

“Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than He is.”

God is holy to the infinite perfection of His moral beauty. Holiness in the Bible is a dynamic concept. It is a concept that can be applied to things; it can be applied to animals; and climactically, it can be applied to people. It can be applied to objects that are set apart and reserved for God’s special use. It can be applied to animals that are set apart and consecrated for God's use. It can be applied to individuals, and ultimately to an entire people, the people of God who are set apart and reserved for God's special use in the world. To be holy means to reflect God's moral perfection, His beauty, and it means to be set apart for His use. To be a holy people means a people that belong ultimately to God. Israel's high priest displayed this at the center of her worshiping life with a diadem upon his head that said: “Holy to the Lord.” This man belongs to God. He is to reflect the radiance of God's beauty and splendor.

This morning, I want to give you an overview of the entire Book of Leviticus. I want to get you oriented to this thrilling portion of God's Word. For those of you who struggle with history, there are no dates to remember in Leviticus. It is just one scene. It is just one moment. For those of us that learn by repetition, this call to be holy will be repeated and rehearsed until we understand it. It will be applied in a myriad of ways. I want us to look through Leviticus together, so keep your Bible open. We will walk through this glorious portion together, and over the fall, we will explore these sections in greater intimacy and depth. We learn in the Book of Leviticus that holiness begins at the altar. Leviticus chapters 1-7 describe the worshiping life of God's people in a system of sacrificial offerings. Leviticus 1:1-2 says:

“The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said: ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “When you bring an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.”””

This first offering is called the burnt offering or the offering that rises like a sweet aroma to God. There is great joy in Scripture of presenting the sacrifice to God, and though this seems foreign to us, the bringing of an offering to God is something deep within us. The offerings that are presented in Leviticus 1-7 are offerings for sin. They are offerings of total devotion. They are offerings of thanksgiving and gratitude, and they are, in the end, offerings of fellowship and communion. It is a place where we feast together with the Lord. The Scripture celebrates the

giving of offerings. In Psalm 27:6, we read:

“I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.”

We thank the Lord for His steadfast love and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His deeds in songs of joy. To bring an offering to God is to express in concrete action our praise, our thanksgiving, and our gratitude to God and to celebrate communion and fellowship. Sacrifices are presented without blemish, blameless. In Leviticus 1-3, we are told that the offerings we bring are brought from our very best, not like the sacrifice of Cain, who in the early portions of the Bible grabbed a handful of his work and presented it to God. Too often we find a lack of joy in living for God because we are not offering to God our very best. The sacrifice of Abel, we read, was of the very best. God says: “Offer to Me that which is without defect; place Me at the center and the highest point of your affections.” The first sacrifices in Leviticus are those which effect atonement, the forgiveness of sin.”

The burnt offering rises morning and evening. There is not a moment in Israel's life of worship where there is not an offering for our sin burning on the altar. When you come into the sanctuary, the first thing you see is God providing forgiveness for you and for me. That is the same thing you see when you come into most Christian churches. When you walk into a church, when you walk into the Kenwood Baptist Church, whether you know it or not, the first thing that you're noticing, or should notice, is that there is an offering for the forgiveness of sins for you and for me at the center of our worship. The offering of Christ on the cross is the centerpiece of heavenly worship, the Lamb slain. We will look deeper into this system and prescribed pattern of worship next Sunday.

As we move further into Leviticus, beginning in chapter 8 through chapter 16, we will learn that holiness is mediated in Scripture through the high priesthood. This priesthood, this spiritual leadership, is called to holiness. The spiritual leadership in Israel is called to make atonement for sins. It is called to pray, to intercede for the people. Moses calls to Aaron in Leviticus 9:7:

“Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people.”

There is a central role of the priesthood of officiating at the altar. Though Israelites participate in bringing the offering, in laying their hands on it, it is the priesthood that offers the offering, sacrificing the offering for the people to make atonement. We read in Leviticus 10:3 that the Lord says that those who approach Him must live in holiness:

“Among those who approach Me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will

be honored.”

We see a great difference in this point between Israel's priesthood and the priesthood of the surrounding nations. This week I read through the temple personnel that were used at a typical Assyrian Babylonian temple, and it was fascinating. Some of the temple personnel in a typical Assyrian temple include: the *sangu* high priest, *kalu* lamentation priest, *naru/nartu* male/female musician, *asipu/masmassu* exorcist, and four kinds of diviners: *baru* extispicist, *sailu/sailtu* male/female necromancer, dream interpreter, *mahhu* ecstatic, and *dagil* issuer observer of birds.”

This was the temple apparatus and all the people that worked in the temple of the gods. Israel has only one office in the sanctuary: the *kohen*, the priest. Just one! Israel has no one interpreting the entrails of animals. Israel has no one interpreting the movement of birds. Israel has no one making ritual lamentations, no practices of paganism. Instead, Israel has a priesthood that does offerings for sin, prayers for the people, blessing in the name of God, and a central function of teaching the people the commands of God. Which sanctuary do you want to be part of? I want to work in the one where I get to teach and pray and point people to God's provision of forgiveness, and I want to be part of worshiping a God who speaks. God speaks and calls us to imitate Him. The priesthood functions in this way of instructing the people. Baruch Levine says: “The biblical priests taught the people what God required of them.” This educational role is dominant. As we continue to read further in the book of Leviticus, beginning in chapter 17 all the way to the end, the scene shifts to a very practical holiness.

There will be moments this fall when you will need to simply trust God, because He knows that we need to hear these things. For some of you, you will feel like you are finally getting this book around chapter 18. But, beginning in the second half of Leviticus, God describes, in very concrete terms that are stunningly contemporary, practical holiness in our lives. God gives an entire chapter to holiness in our sexual behavior, a huge topic for us today that we will discuss in October. God devotes the entire chapter 19 to what it means to obey God and keep His commandments. God introduces practical holiness in chapter 18 with the summons: “I am the Lord your God.” Then the Lord says: “You must obey My laws, My decrees,” and He says in Leviticus 18:3:

“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 am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.”

We need this charge. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are called by the Lord to abandon our former ways of living and to be on guard for the cultural patterns of living that are around us, patterns that at times are deeply hostile to God. That is difficult, because we are so immersed

in it that we cannot even recognize it. C. S. Lewis, in his work *The Abolition of Man*, has a fascinating comment. Speaking of modern ethics, he says:

“There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the ‘wisdom’ of earlier ages.”

That’s a great leading sentence, isn’t it? There is something that magic has in common with applied science. Both of them share something that makes them different from the movement of Scripture. Lewis continues by saying:

“For the men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to [God’s] reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline and virtue.”

This is the ancient path. What is wrong with the world? My soul is out of step with the revealed will of God. The problem is to exert myself to conform my soul to God's design. He says that in modernity:

“. . . magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men.”

We do this, whether it's through therapy or technology, magic or applied science, we have in our minds the thought: “What's wrong with the world is that reality is not conforming to what I want it to be.” So the problem is to manipulate it. As far away as that may seem to you, many of us in this sanctuary are exerting ourselves with technological tools, trying to manage our emotions, or lives, and hoping that therein lies the solution. Leviticus calls us to something very different. It calls us to exert ourselves in learning the will of God and beginning to do it. That is where we find happiness, meaning, and joy. As Leviticus 18:5 says:

“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”

Life is in the ways of God. Leviticus 19 says we are to live in conformity to God's revealed will. Leviticus 20 says that we are to be consecrated to God and a holy people. Leviticus 20:26 says:

“You are to be holy to Me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be My own.”

In Leviticus 21 this means that Israel spiritual leadership is called to a higher standard. Do you want to be part of a community where leadership is not based on popularity but based on character and godliness? I want to be part of a community like that. Leviticus 23 says that God has a pattern for time and holiness of time, how we are to live. Many of us are racing around to places, and we don’t even know where we are going. Many of us are trying to find those two and a half minutes of meaningless time that technology has provided for us and fill it with something meaningful. God gives us a very different vision of time, appointed time, sacred

time, rhythms of the week, month, and year that are for the good of our souls. Leviticus 24 goes on and speaks of an incident that reveals that our highest regard should be for the holiness of God's name. Leviticus 25 then speaks further about how we are to conduct ourselves in this world, in the environment, in very practical ways. Leviticus 26 and 27 speak of the ending, of the blessing of going in God's ways and the devastating consequences of rejecting them. Leviticus 26:3-4 gives us this glorious promise:

“If you follow My decrees and are careful to obey My commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.”

We know peace; we know a life in which we are not afraid. Do you want that kind of life? I do. I'd like to live in a way that there was no reason to fear. Leviticus offers us this path. Leviticus offers us a path where God says: “I will look on you with favor. You will be fully accepted.” Many of us are exerting ourselves trying to find acceptance from the people around us, and Leviticus shows us, especially next week, how to find true and lasting and full acceptance. It is finding it first and foremost with God. The Lord says in Leviticus 26:11-12:

“I will put My dwelling place among you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people.”

This reminds us of the Garden of Eden. The Lord reminds us of the Exodus in Leviticus 26:13 and says:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”

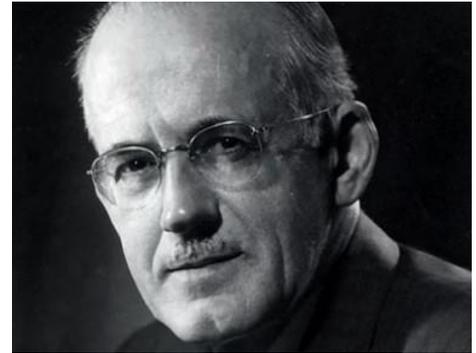
Do you want that type of a life? Sin makes you less and less of a person over time. Addiction will promise you great things and deliver less and less and less. The Lord God says: “I’ll break the yoke.” We have things that are on us, things from within our own hearts or things we picked up from the culture around us, things that weigh us down and bend us over, and we need the Lord God Almighty to come and lift those bars. He doesn't just lift them off of you, He lifts them off you, and then, with these powerful, Almighty arms, He says: “I am just going to go ahead and break those iron bars so that they will never fit on your neck again.” Then you walk with your head up high, so different.

I don't have great vision; I need corrective lenses. I'm in big trouble without my glasses. I remember as a young man walking around the streets of Detroit, and my vision was starting to fail. I didn't want to say anything. I didn't want to get glasses. I remember walking around Detroit with my family, and I smacked right into a lamppost. My dad looked at me, and I looked at him, and I had to admit I did need glasses. When you have corrective lenses from God's Word

and your head is up high, you can walk in freedom and joy. That is what we will experience as we dig deeper into Leviticus. Let me close with three very important reasons why we need the Book of Leviticus.

Number one: We need Leviticus **to recover our sense of the majesty and holiness of God.** A.

W. Tozer, leading pastor, theologian, popular writer, wrote a work called *The Knowledge of the Holy*, and he said the greatest thing wrong in the church in his generation was an absence of the sense of the majesty and holiness of God in the hearts of God's own people. This is a profound insight. Tozer says: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It is the most accurate predictor of where we are headed as



individuals and as a church. What do you think of when you think of the Lord? What first comes to your mind? I hope, whether today or by the end of this series, it will be an obvious dominant, overwhelmingly beautiful first thought that comes into your mind that the Lord God Almighty is holy; He is majestic and beautiful, and all His ways are right. He is powerful and can be trusted. We need the Book of Leviticus to recover a sense of the majesty and holiness of God.

Number two: We need the Book of Leviticus **to hear the Lord God Almighty calling us in Scripture to a radical imitation of Him: "Be holy for I am holy."** It is what Jesus says in Matthew 5:48:

"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus uses the very same term that is used of all the sacrifices in Leviticus. We live in a society that just cannot stand delayed gratification. It's abhorrent. We have reached the point now that, at least in Seattle, you can go to Amazon and order beer and have it delivered to your house within an hour. What else could we need, right? It's like, I need something, I desire something, and it just falls out of the sky with a drone. What an enslaved way to live according to the Bible! Trapped to the limit of what you would think to ask for, what you and I would think that we need. We would never log in and say, "God, I need more holiness. I need more radical conformity to Your will. Can I get that with two-day free shipping?" But, isn't that what we really need? I want to invite you into a six-month, delayed-gratification. I saw something this spring and summer about the structural correspondence of Leviticus and Romans that just sent my heart into flames of delight. I'm not going to tell you what it is for six months. There is a deep inner correspondence between how Leviticus is structured and Paul's letter to the Romans is structured, and we will see it together. I promise you it's good. Let's just wait six months.

Number three: We need Leviticus in the end because **we cannot understand the Person and work of Jesus Christ without it.** We need the book of Leviticus because at the center of Christian faith there is an offering for sin. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is our burnt offering, our sin offering, and He offers to you and to me, in this table, the fellowship offering of communion. Jesus Christ is our mediating High Priest. If we are honest, you and I wonder deep down if we are fully accepted in God's presence. All of us should wonder that. Not only is Jesus our offering, He is our High Priest. No one can come to God without a mediator. Choose wisely who is mediating on your behalf. There is a Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who will safely bringing you there, whose own blood will make atonement for you and for me, and whose own promise of the Holy Spirit will make you holy and empower you to live over time in increasing conformity to His will. We need the book of Leviticus in the end so that we know our Savior and recognize Him.

Amen