

00:00

Introduction

Well, hey, welcome to Ponder. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord as it was preached on Sunday and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Ben.

I'm joined today by Jack and Tristan. Welcome. What's up?

G'day. So Sunday's sermon was titled Christ in Leviticus. We're gonna spend half an hour diving into that book and that message and exploring that.

If you haven't listened to the sermon first, make sure you go do that before you listen to this. So Jack, you preached the sermon. Would you give us a 60-second recap of that message?

0:37

Sermon recap

Yeah, sure.

So we started by positioning Leviticus within the story of the Pentateuch. You know, it's at that middle point, just after Exodus, where God is dwelling in the camp, but the Israelites can't quite get to him yet.

And then we talked about the purpose of Leviticus being to sort of bridge that gap between God and Israel, and especially through this idea of holiness and sort of looked at three different areas of holiness.

So, holiness, of course, I should define as being set apart from the ordinary, the ordinary being sort of corrupted and sinful. So first, you've got ethical holiness, so Israel being set apart by their actions.

You've got ritual holiness, where Israel sort of gets set apart through their sort of separation from these things that are symbolic of the broken world.

And then thirdly, you have priestly holiness, which involves the priests and the sacrifices set apart to serve God in sort of the tabernacle.

And they sort of function to clean the Israelite community whenever they fail in the other areas of holiness, as it were.

And so, through each of those areas, we kind of looked especially at how Jesus kind of embodies each of them, especially with ethical holiness, right? He intensifies that. He really calls us to a high level of ethical holiness with ritual holiness.

I mean, Jesus is all about cleaning people and making them acceptable to God.

And then probably the most key is with the priestly holiness, where Jesus embodies both the high priest role and the sacrifice role and restores humanity sort of at the deepest level to relationship with God.

So that's, I guess, the sermon in a nutshell.

2:30

Why do we find reading Leviticus so hard?

See, I love that.

That makes Leviticus seem so easy and understandable, which is so not the experience of so many people.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have decided on New Year's Day to read through the entire Bible, and I smash Genesis, smash Exodus, and then I drop off in the middle of Leviticus. Why do you think people find Leviticus so hard?

I think they find it very, it's not breathable. It's a lot to intake at one point, like all these rules where we live in a society where the rule book is very loose at the moment.

Yeah, definitely. I think also just the genre. I mean, you go into like Exodus and Genesis, and they're like these really cool stories.

I mean, you know, the prose is, you know, it's not a, it's in translation, right? So it's not written like an English fiction book, but, you know, there's characters, there's character development. You can follow the plot.

There's exciting developments and cool sort of humor.

Whereas, yeah, I think just by the nature of the genre, reading a bunch of what is essentially legislation, it's just, I mean, unless you're a lawyer, you probably don't enjoy, it's probably not the most engaging thing to spend your time just going

down through these long lists. So kind of very understandable from that point.

3:56

How is Leviticus relevant today?

One of the questions that I thought of is, Leviticus is a massive string of laws and rituals and practices and sacrifices.

Didn't Jesus die to set us free from the law? Like, it's great if we could read Leviticus and it would send us to Jesus, but why should we read Leviticus in the first place if Jesus has set us free from the law?

Great question. I think if you look at what Jesus actually says about the law, I think we tend to contrast the law with Jesus a lot for understandable reasons. I mean, the law in our minds often represents the burden that we can't live up to.

But I sort of made this point in the sermon that Jesus is not actually trying to abolish the law, that he actually speaks very highly of the law, that he's not come to abolish it but to fulfill it.

That heaven and earth will pass away, but not one jot will pass away from the law and the prophets. So Jesus actually has this very high view of the law. I've got to be careful what I say here.

It's not so much that he has come to free us from the law, but from our own inability to follow the law.

I think there are, if you look at even what Paul says, but a lot of what the Old Testament says, you know, the law is not necessarily an evil thing.

Psalm 1 treats it as this, sort of, it says, you know, meditate on the law of the Lord, and it makes you like a tree who's blossoming and fruitful. I think the biblical attitude to the law is not one that it's bad or oppressive. It's a good thing.

We just struggle to live up to that goodness. And that's what Jesus is freeing us from, our own inability and our own sin and our own failure to live up to the law. I think even Paul says, you know, is the law evil?

By no means, he says in Romans somewhere, I can't remember the reference.

And I think I have a thought where it's, it hinges on the word fulfillment. Like what does that word mean in that context? Is it fulfillment in the future context or is it rectifying it in its current context?

Like what is he fulfilling?

Because we usually hear that word fulfillment and we think about like prophecies, right? And so Jesus is making that prophecy come true.

But I think certainly in terms of Leviticus, we are talking about, if I recall correctly, the Greek word that they use in the New Testament is literally to fill up, like a container being filled up.

And so Jesus is sort of the the fullest embodiment of what the law means, right? And so I made this point with the ethical holiness, right? That the law gives these sort of surface level regulations, right?

Don't murder someone, don't commit adultery, but Jesus is trying to actually unlock the full depth of what it's trying to say. It's a, I don't want you to be the type of person that murders people or even harbors anger in your heart.

I don't want you to be the type of person that is unfaithful to your wife or your husband at the core of who you are, not just sort of keeping those desires at bay, but to not to have those desires at all.

So that, you know, I mean, Jesus, that's in some ways, Jesus' teaching is more challenging than Leviticus in that way.

But yeah, I mean, he is the, the functions that Leviticus seeks to do, it's purposes, Jesus fulfills those purposes successfully, whereas Leviticus offered them, but it didn't really offer Israel any way to get better at doing them, if that makes

sense. sense.

7:46

Does Jesus raise the bar or deepen the source of the law?

This idea that Jesus came to fulfill the law, I think we could take in two ways.

In fact, we could take the entire sermon on the mount in two ways. You mentioned in the sermon that Jesus raises the bar of the law.

Leviticus says, don't murder, Jesus says, don't be angry, Leviticus says, don't commit adultery, Jesus says, don't lust.

My reading of the sermon on the mount is not that Jesus raises the bar, but that he deepens the source, which is saying the same thing, but in a different direction, which I think actually gets to the crux of the function of the law in the Old

Testament. It was never a measuring stick for Israel to prove how good they are before God. It was always about the transformation of a certain type of person that reflects the holiness of God.

So Jesus comes in Matthew 5, 17, says, I've not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. And then he talks in the Sermon on the Mount about murder and anger and lust and adultery and all these things.

He's not raising the bar of what it means to be good before God. He's deepening the source of our action to say that what God cares most about is not that we are outwardly a certain type of person, but that we are inwardly a certain type of person.

And if he, if Jesus has come to transform our heart, then from the inside out, we become the sort of person who doesn't commit adultery or who doesn't even lust, who doesn't murder and he's not even angry at a brother or sister.

9:07

What's the difference between the laws of Leviticus and the teaching of Jesus?

Yeah, I think that's it.

And that raises a thought for me. I wonder what you guys think about this, which is there's a slight difference in Jesus and Leviticus' teachings there. Because Jesus is meeting people at an individual level, right?

He's talking about you don't lust after your brother in heart, whereas Leviticus seems to be looking at trying to mold Israel as a collective, as a society. I wonder what...

I mean, obviously, it wants to be a community of the type of people that Jesus is talking about. But I wonder if that shapes the way it talks about it or the way it sort of lays it out like a law book, because that's how you...

Laws are how we govern a group of people rather than just one individual. I don't know. What do you guys think about that?

I think in the sermon you quoted a verse in Numbers where one of the nations around Israel looks at Israel and says, wow, you guys live different.

And that's such a great verse because it's saying that the law has worked, that Israel is set apart as a holy people dedicated to the Lord who live differently from the nations around them.

And then you see Jesus as the Messiah who kind of channels the story of Israel into one person.

And then from that one person then reconstitutes the people of Israel, not around the ethnic boundary of circumcision that you are an Israelite, but around the boundary of faith. And so Jew and Gentile are together the people of God.

And so in that sense, it comes down to the individual and then builds back out to the community again.

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's awesome. Yeah, I have heard of that idea.

I guess that fits into the sort of the hourglass shape of salvation, where God's blessing gets to a smaller and smaller and smaller group of people during the Old Testament until it reaches one person, Jesus, and then goes outer, outer, outer becomes

bigger. bigger.

10:57

How is priestly holiness relevant today?

Yeah.

I have a question about the third part of your sermon. You talked about ethical holiness, ritual holiness and priestly holiness. I can understand the way that ethical holiness speaks to us today.

I can understand the ritual holiness. But the whole convoluted system of priestly holiness, how does that speak to us today when we don't have priests in anything like the sense in which they had priests?

Yeah. Great question. Well, we do have a high priest.

As I mentioned, Jesus takes on those functions.

I think that there's a theme throughout Jesus' ministry of him taking on, I guess in academia, they would call this stuff, the tabernacle system, the cultic system, the sacrificial system, they call that the cult, not in the sense of it's a dodgy

thing, but just in terms of these are the ritual and ceremonial regulations. Jesus talks a lot about himself taking on that whole system. So, he talks about the temple, right, which supersedes the tabernacle.

That he talks about his body in terms of it being the temple. He talks a lot about, you know, you'll destroy this temple in three days and I'll raise it again.

He talks, he sort of has a few stinging rebukes for the temple in the gospels, you know, that talks about the withering of the fig tree, which I think is sort of a metaphor for the temple system.

And in fact, you know, the church also becomes sort of this metaphor for, takes on this metaphor for the temple. All of that to say is that Jesus, the functions that those things performed are still valid.

Jesus has just taken that on, in that he has become the one who makes atonement for us.

And I think they speak to us that we do need a sort of cleansing, I mean, that the gospel doesn't really make sense, if we don't need cleansing, if that makes sense. So I think the priestly holiness shows just how much cleansing we need.

So I think it illustrates that, absolutely.

13:11

How does the "contagious holiness" of Jesus affect us?

You talked about this idea then that uncleanness is contagious.

That if you touch a dead thing, you're unclean, but then if somebody touches you, they are also unclean. It's like this growing, growing uncleanness.

In contrast to this beautiful story you read from Luke 5, where Jesus touches a leper, which under the old system would make Jesus unclean, but instead Jesus cleanliness cleans the leper and heals him.

What do you, I just love that idea that you called it the contagious holiness of Jesus, that he spreads cleanliness and he spreads holiness to the people he touches. What do you think that means for our life? How does that impact us?

I think it reshapes the way we would approach life in general.

Because if Christ is clean, then that's what we should be should be going for.

And then going back to what Jack said earlier with the uncleanness, if people approach the tabernacle, like Moses couldn't go into the tent and other people couldn't go into the tent. So if they were unclean, there's a question.

If they were unclean in that moment going into the tent, who's to say they can just go clean themselves, have a bath and just come back in? Like that they could do that.

And that it got me thinking like how in a modern day, people use church sort of as that cleaning room.

Like we come in with our brokenness, get clean and then we either go back and do the same thing and come back again on Sunday or we live out that what we take from a Sunday.

14:55

How do the cleanliness laws apply today?

So what are your thoughts in terms of the uncleanness with the tent and just going back and like restoring yourself and then coming back? Like what does that look like today?

Yeah, I think the difference is that we have this sense of we don't need to. Or we have been cleaned at a fundamental level by Jesus. We've had one washing, right?

So in some sense, whilst we do need to repent when we still do sin, we have had this one washing that cleans the core of our soul that makes us acceptable to God.

And so this idea of contagious holiness is that we're actually to, we have this, I've heard the metaphor of a disease used for the gospel or like a spiritual or an intellectual disease and not that it's, not that it's bad, but it's contagious, right?

And I've heard this like even apart from the Leviticus thing, where it spreads from one person to another, to another, to another. And it's just like everyone's crazy, like it keeps popping up everywhere and it's infectious.

And so I think, I think we're, we're called to be superspreaders as it were.

That's actually, you know, we have this disease that's really beneficial, that we should be spreading around, that like, not that in the way that, and I was careful to sort of, with my wording in the, not that I clean you by touching you, but that I

connect you to Jesus when I bring you into the gospel, and then you get cleaned through him. And it's through contact with him that, you know, you get cleaned.

I mean, I think of, it's not specifically talked about in terms of cleaning, but there are so many times in the gospel where someone just, I think of the woman who's been bleeding for 12 years, right?

That's another thing that would make her unclean for all of those 12 years. And she's like, if I can just touch his cloak, I'll be healed. And she is.

I mean, I think that's one of my favorite Jesus stories. And that's another great example of that contagious holiness of just like coming into contact with Jesus. Makes you clean.

And then you get similar things of, you see some of the stories of the apostles, right? Where people want to just, they want Peter's shadow to fall on them because of the great miracles that he's doing.

And it's not from him, but he's connected to Jesus. And when he brings them into contact with Jesus, they get healed. And there's this sort of ripple effect of it coming out from this sort of epicenter.

And I think it's a call for us to do likewise. I mean, you know, there are lots of people around the world in our society, in our lives, that need this healing, that needs this cleansing. And we are the...

Wait, we've got to kind of... This sounds terrible. To infect them, as it were.

Yeah.

Gospel super spirit is.

Yeah.

I like that.

And with contagious holiness, it really shapes not in action, but your desire behind it, your driving desire behind it. It's to share Christ, you know? Like, it's not just a physical thing you're doing, it's an attitude change.

Yeah, absolutely.

18:32

What didn't make it into the final sermon?

I'm curious, Jack, I know how much study you put into this sermon.

How much, firstly, how much study that you... How many cool things that you found in Leviticus didn't fit in the sermon? And maybe one or two of the coolest things that you didn't get to say that are cool about Leviticus.

Wow.

There's a lot. I mean, when you...

I basically went through just slowly taking notes on every chapter, just because, you know, I just wanted to get myself familiar with it, to starters, because I think it's so easy to skim over and not fully appreciate the detail.

I found the sacrifices in the first seven chapters to be really interesting, especially if you sit down and take notes about what the differences between them, right? And one of the things that you can notice, who gets to eat it and who doesn't.

So the very first sacrifice is the, the ola, the whole burnt offering or the sort of the rising offering. No one eats that. That is a sacrifice that is just an act of worship for God.

No human is benefiting from it. No human's eating the meat. It's just being given to God.

And then you have the, the minkah, the sort of tribute, the grain offering. It's often translated as the priest gets to eat that. So it's sort of called a holy thing.

And then I think the one that I really wanted to talk about in the sermon, but I didn't get the chance, is the peace offering, the zavak shalom, which is, it doesn't have the function of cleansing, like the sin and guilt offerings.

But it is the only offering where everyone eats from it. So obviously you get the offering being burnt to God, you get the priests having their portion, and then you get the offer gets to eat their portion as well.

And so I like that it's called the peace offering, or sometimes we scam over this, the shalom offering, right?

And if you know much about the biblical idea of shalom, it's this idealized state of reality where we're at peace with God and enjoying his presence.

And I think the peace offering is the perfect embodiment of that, where God and his people are eating a meal together. I just think that's what Leviticus wants. That's the idealized relationship right there.

And there's sort of an obligation to... There's a time period, right, in which you're supposed to eat it, right? I think it's like you're supposed to eat it either all on the same day or...

One of them has it within three days. But it's like, no, we're having a party tonight. Like, no leftovers, you know, feast.

I love that. I think there's a lot of similarities between the peace offering especially, but a lot of the sacrifices and communion and this idea of, okay, we come together in a meal, a meal that is also representative of a sacrifice.

We come into the presence of God and we remember what has been done and we also enjoy, we eat together and we have this communal meal in the presence of God. I think there's some definite parallels with communion and the peace offering.

So that's probably the biggest thing I thought was just really, really cool.

That's awesome. Who would have thought that Leviticus has a party in the middle of it? But that's the invitation.

22:28

How baptism and communion trace back to Leviticus

Yeah.

When I was planning the sermon, I almost sort of did it in terms of Christian rituals, because you can arguably trace both communion and especially baptism back to Leviticus, because Leviticus talks about washing as a cleansing for sin.

What do you think baptism is? Where do you think they got that? You know, baptism, when John originally starts baptizing people, he's doing it for repentance, right?

So when you're turning away for your sin to be cleansed from your sin, I think that's exactly what Leviticus is talking about.

And so this idea of a sacrifice that cleanses, but also that we get to have peace with God, all of those themes are in the Levitical sacrifices. And they find themselves in this new institution of communion, the Lord's Supper.

And then also we have the washings of Leviticus transformed into this one powerful moment, which is baptism.

I mean, I think we as Christians, the language and the concepts of Leviticus are still very much within our everyday language and way of thinking about our faith.

We've just sort of disconnected the fact that these things originated in Leviticus, when in fact, it's really, its symbols and its functions are really very real and very much a part of our theology and our way of talking in the church.

That's awesome.

24:06

Final takeaways from Leviticus

So as we finish, I'd love to ask, what is one main takeaway that you guys each take from our time in Leviticus, Christ in Leviticus?

I think it's for me, it's to not be scared anymore.

Like, it's a very unapproachable text where there's so much truth in it.

And one of the biggest things I've learned from it is that once you look and actually give time into the text, there's so much application there that we could use, and there's so much imagery, as you pointed out.

And I think the main takeaway for me is that it emphasizes what we were speaking about earlier in terms of that hourglass, is that all these rules, all these different things are all embodied in Christ, and that should just draw us nearer to Him.

And I find that so encouraging in the midst of all these rules, all these rituals, which are good. And then here's Christ and says, I am all these things. And that should just get us running even faster towards Him.

Yeah.

Love it. For me, it's that contagious holiness idea, that when we come to Jesus, the first time, He forgives us and He cleanses us.

And even though in life we feel like we don't deserve to come back before Him again, He cleanses us every time we come to Him. He's full of mercy and grace and kindness. And so I'm encouraged to keep coming back to Him.

Not that I need to be cleansed. You made the point that we have one baptism, one washing, you are forgiven. But this sense of every time I come to Him, His mercy and grace is new for me again.

I'm going to hold on to that. What about you, Jack?

I was just thinking of, there's a Columbia Canon song that goes, the greatest treasure in the whole wide world is peace with God.

Oh, bang! Great song.

Yeah, it's awesome. And I just, I think that that is peace with God. That's really what Leviticus is trying to do.

I think you really connect that to what Jesus says about the kingdom of God, that a man's willing to sell his field in order to get this treasure that's worth so much more.

I think, you know, the reason Leviticus lays out all of this stuff is because peace with God, relationship with God is worth it. It's such a like treasure that Leviticus is trying to seek. And so I think, I think that's one of my big takeaways.

The inestimable value of peace with God, I think is something that I'll be taking away.

Awesome. Well, thank you for joining us. Come back next time.