



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Leviticus 13:45 & 48

“The Law of the Leper’s Cleansing”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight is the “Law of the Leper’s Cleansing, and we are continuing our studies of typology. And so we are looking at these chapters in the Old Testament, specifically, in the Book of Leviticus with a view to seeing the ways in which they do point forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know from the New Testament that there are many, many pictures of our Lord Jesus in the Old testament. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews begins his 10th chapter by saying, “The law having a shadow of good things to come.” So according to him the Old Testament is a kind of a picture book in which the ministry of Jesus Christ is set forth. The Apostle Paul in Colossians chapter 2, makes reference to the same kind of thing when he mentions the Sabbath and days and months and years and says that, “While these things are shadows the substance belongs to Christ,” and what he means by that is that all of these ancient ceremonial requirements of the Levitical economy were designed to point forward to the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes mention of this more than once in the 8th chapter as well as in the 10th chapter he says something that pertains to this. Chapter 8 in verse 5 he writes concerning the Old Testament and the priesthood, “Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” And then in chapter 9, verse 9, he says, “Concerning the tabernacle

which is a symbol for the time then present.” So the New Testament authors make a great deal over the fact that the Old Testament is a true foreshadowing of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. I do not hear a great deal of preaching today in which the types are stressed. I don’t know whether it’s because I’m hearing the right persons or what, but I do not hear a great deal of this and I do think it’s important and it’s something we ought to pay very careful attention to. It’s part of old fashioned preaching of the word of God and it encourages us in our doctrines of inspiration and atonement to see the way in which the Old Testament pictured the coming of Christ long before he came.

Mr. Spurgeon reckoned, as one of the greatest compliments that he ever received, an enemy who said, “Here is a man who was not moved an inch forward in all his ministry and at the close of the nineteenth century his teaching the theology of the first century and as proclaiming the doctrine of Nazareth and Jerusalem current eighteen hundred years ago.” Well that is a great compliment because it expresses the fact that Mr. Spurgeon did hue to the word of God to the end of his days. Part of the preaching of the word of God involves this stress on the Old Testament as the revelation of God that points forward to the Lord Jesus.

So we’re turning to Leviticus chapter 13 and chapter 14, which give us, “The Law of the Leper’s Cleansing.” Chapter 13 is a very lengthy chapter of fifty-nine verses in which Moses gives instructions concerning the tests by which leprosy could be determined to exist not only in individuals but even in houses. And then at the beginning of chapter 14, he speaks about the law of the leper’s cleansing.

It is doubtful that there is any disease which so completely reduces the human body to a wreck as the disease of leprosy. It might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge, the eyebrows fall out, the eyes become staring, the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice become hoarse and the breath wheezes, the hand and feet always ulcerate. Slowly, the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerate growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is about nine years and it

ends in mental decay, in a coma and, ultimately, death. Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body in which case the nerve trunks are affected. The muscles waste away. The tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet, then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may just drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty or thirty years. It is a kind of progressive death in which a man dies by inches. It is often called, I believe, Hansen’s disease. We’re not exactly certain of the kind of leprosy that existed in the Old Testament but, I think, you can see already that this is a disease that would be a very good illustration of the nature of sin in the spiritual sphere and I want to say something about that a little later on.

Let’s look now at chapter 13, verse 45 and verse 46, first because here we have the condition of the leper. God after having set forth in the earlier part of chapter 13, the ways by which the leper’s leprosy might be determined sets forth now in verse 45, in verse 46 of chapter 13, some of the things that are to be true of the person in whom this disease has been found. Verse 45 says, “As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn.” They shall be ripped. Now, rending was something that took place as an evidence of mourning over death; so that the rending of the garments of the leper was designed to represent the hopeless condition of a leper. “And the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, “Unclean! Unclean! He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean.” Incidentally, when these words are used here, “He is unclean,” the reference is not so much to the disease itself in the physical sense as it is to the ceremonial status of the man before the levitical economy. He remains unclean ceremonially until he is pronounced clean by the priest when healing has come; so this “unclean, unclean” means that he is ceremonially unclean even though the disease itself may produce what one would call uncleanness in the physical sense.

Now, notice the last words of verse 46, “He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” Now, you can see from this that the leper then is a person who is reckoned to be under judgment ceremonially. His clothes are rent in token of the fact of mourning over the death that has come to him. He is defiled because he is unclean and further he must live without the camp. There is no fellowship between the leper and the company of the people of God. You can see immediately that leprosy makes a very good illustration of sin.

There are four ways in which leprosy illustrates sin. It is an inward disease primarily, and sin is a disease that affects the spirit of a man. It is a loathsome disease. One could feel the leprosy and one could smell it and one could hear it. It was so bad, incidentally, that when the rabbis saw a man who was a leper coming down the street, they wouldn’t go down the same street with him. They would not even eat an egg that was for sale in a street down which a leper had come. It is a very loathsome disease and sin in the sight of God is a loathsome disease. It was a separating disease. It was a disease that separated the individual from the fellowship of the people of God and the Scriptures make very plain that the person outside of Jesus Christ is dead in trespasses and sins. He is separated from fellowship with God and from the people of God. It was also an incurable disease. There is some evidence by the way that it was a diffusive disease. While it was not contagious, probably, there is evidence that it was communicated from parents to children and if that is true it would then also beautifully illustrate original sin. The corruption that is transmitted in the human race from parents to children meaning which according to Scripture is evidence of the fact that we have sinned in Adam in the Garden of Eden. So it was an incurable disease. Exclusion from the community was ceremonial. Lepers were healed. We do have evidence of that. Naaman, for example, the Syrian was healed of his leprosy but there were few illustrations of healing from leprosy until our Lord came.

As far as the Old Testament is concerned we have no record of anyone in Israel ever being healed of leprosy for fifteen hundred years to the time of our Lord. So you can imagine the great impression that was made when the leper approached the Lord Jesus and said, “Lord if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.” A magnificent expression of faith, he calls him Lord. He acknowledges his divine sovereignty. He says, “If you will you can make me clean.” He even acknowledged that it is occasionally the Lord’s will that he not heal and he says, “If you will you can make me clean,” and the Lord Jesus reached out his hand and touched him signifying that not only is his power to heal but also his desire to show his compassion and fellowship for he touched this loathsome creature and communicated the healing power by means of that touch. And then, remember, he said, “Now I want you to go and offer the gifts that Moses law commanded.” Can you not see the leper coming to the priests and asking the priests to take a look at him as is set forth in this chapter and the priest amazed at what he sees and then the leper saying to him Jesus to whom he told me to offer the gifts commanded by Moses in the book of the law. And I can imagine the priest since he’d never had any occasion to do this; this was absolutely new to him. He knew nothing about this. He probably rushed to the back and said, “Where’s the manual?” [Laughter] “Where is the preacher’s manual,” trying to look up what to do in the case of leper who was healed. Well this then is a picture of a man outside of Christ. He’s dead, defouled, separated from fellowship from God. That’s the picture you get. It’s a very vivid picture.

Incidentally, when David confesses his sin, his great sin in Psalm 51 in verse 7, he speaks in the language of the cleansing of the leper, “Purify me with hyssop;” for the hyssop was used in connection with the cleaning of the leper. The pronouncing of him clean so he recognized himself by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that leprosy was a type of sin. He saw that and confesses his own sin in the language of the lepers cleansing.

Well, let’s look at the instruction that is given in chapter 14, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now, he shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp.” The cleansing of the leper referred to here in verses 1 and 2, you can see is a cleansing that has just occurred. It is not something wrought by anyone but what follows simply presupposes that there had been a cleansing. By the way, the Law of Moses had no provision whatsoever for the cleansing of a leper. You can see that right here. The law didn’t have anything to do with it. It just says simply, “Now this shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing.” So when suddenly, for no apparent obvious reason, the leper discovers that his leprosy is leaving him and he has been cleansed, then the first thing that he does is to call for the priests because the priest is the one who will officially pronounce him clean and he must be pronounced officially clean by the priests. So he calls for the priest first.

Now, we read of the coming of the priest. “And the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp.” Now, whether that is a reference to our Lord Jesus as the great high priest who in coming in his incarnate state down into our midst went out outside the camp seeking to seek and to save that which is lost whether that is pictured by this or not we are not certain but it’s certainly agrees with that. The coming of the priest then might suggest the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in verse 3, further, “Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed.” Now, notice this, he is to obtain birds, take two live clean birds. He does not say what kind but the missioner speaks of sparrows as being the means by which the cleansing is to take place. I’ve always wondered what is the practical use of a sparrow and, evidently, in those days they did have some practical use. So the two birds were to be taken.

Now, notice what is to take place in connection with the birds. In the 5th verse, Moses writes, “The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water.” Now, I don’t want to carry this too far in our typological thinking because there are some of the points of the illustrative portions of the Book of Leviticus that I cannot be certain about, but it is very plain that when he says that one of the birds is to be slain that he is talking about the necessity for the shedding of blood for cleansing. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 9 in verse 22, “So here again we are brought into the language of atonement two birds to be taken and one of them is to be slain in an earthenware vessel over running water.” Some have suggested that the earthenware vessel was a reference to our Lord Jesus who came in the form of a human being and the running water suggestive perhaps of atonement and cleansing as well.

I am not certain about that, but it is clear that substitution or penal substitution is reflected in the slaying of the bird because notice it is by virtue of the shedding of the blood of the bird that the leper will be pronounced clean by the Levitical priest and furthermore, the fact that the bird must be slain is the evidence of judgment. So it is a picture then of the slaying of the bird of the penal substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no atonement we’ve been saying over and over again without the shedding of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ had come as merely a great prophet he would not have been a savior for us. If he had simply come as a great man giving us an example of how men ought to live he would never have been a Savior for us. It is insufficient for the Lord Jesus to be simply an example or simply a prophet or simply a great religious teacher. It is absolutely essential that he also shed his blood as an atoning sacrifice because we are guilty and it is in our substitute that we bear the penalty that is due us. That is the whole point of the coming of the Lord Jesus. If that is not the way which men are justified before God, then as Paul says in Galatians 2:21, “If righteousness were by the law then Christ died in vain.” It would have been the greatest blunder of the

universe for Jesus Christ to be crucified if one could be saved apart from the sacrifice that he offered on the cross at Calvary. So it is a substitutionary work that is pictured by the bird that is slain and it is a penal substitution. That is, our Lord dies as a substitute under the judgment of our sins.

But now he doesn’t stop with that he goes on to say or speak about the living bird in verse 6 and verse 7. The slain bird and the living bird, this is the unique feature of the law of the lepers cleansing. Verse 6, “As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them” that is the live bird together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop “shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water.” I wonder why this was done. The Bible doesn’t tell us this and we just must surmise from what we know of Old Testament ritual and of New Testament fulfillment. I would imagine that the reason this is done is to identify these two birds as being involved in the same essential sacrifice but picturing different aspects of the work of our Lord Jesus. The first bird picturing his death as a penal substitution and now the other bird identified with that by being dipped in the blood of the first making one sacrifice, but what will be done with the second bird is different suggesting the different aspect of the Lord’s work that is being pictured here.

We read that in verse 7, “He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy.” The sprinkling is the application of the benefits of the shedding of the blood. I would think that the application suggests the work of God in applying the benefits of the atonement to the individual who has come in faith for forgiveness of sins. Just as the blood was applied to the door posts in Egypt when the children of Israel went out at the Passover suggestive of the application of the benefits of the work of Christ to our own spirits and the salvation that comes, thereby, so the leper who has been cleansed shall be sprinkled seven times with the blood of the bird that was slain. And then we read and the priest, “shall pronounce him clean.”



Now, notice that he is already clean but the priest now pronounces him clean. It is a judicial pronouncement on the part of the priest. He’s already clean but he is pronounced clean. Now, one thing we learned from the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Galatians and other parts of Paul’s literature is that when a man is justified he is not made righteous, he is declared righteous. He’s made righteous through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The merits of his atoning sacrifice and through faith he comes to the place where God declares him righteous. I think here we have something that suggests that shall pronounce him clean. So it is the work of the priest to pronounce the leper clean what has already been cleansed. It’s a judicial pronouncement. One of the benefits of the Christian life is the knowledge that we stand before God righteous justified.

Now, notice what happens to the live bird after this. We read, “And shall let the live bird go free over the open field.” So what is done then with the two birds is this; one of the birds is slain, the blood is taken mixed with some water according to the Michener tractate which describes the details so that there may be sprinkling. The live bird is identified with the sacrifice of the bird that is slain. The blood is sprinkled upon the leper. The priests pronounce him clean and then he takes the live bird which has been dipped in the blood of the bird that was slain and lets the bird fly in the field. And you can just see the bird flying up into the heavens released.

Now, the two pictures are a picture clearly of the death of our Lord Jesus and his resurrection; the two aspects of our Lord’s work. Will you turn with me over to Romans chapter 4 in verse 25? If we were studying the Epistle to the Romans, I think, this would make an illustration of this verse Romans 4. Let me read verse 24 and 25. The apostle writes, “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,” look at the 25th verse, “Who was delivered up because of our transgressions was raised because of our justification.” He was delivered up to the cross

on account of our sins. He was raised on account of our justification. What is Paul saying? Well he is saying it is our sins that have brought him to the cross. He was delivered to the cross on account of our sins but he says he was released on account I’m not getting leprosy with [laughter] hoarseness so far as I know, but he says that he was delivered on account of our offenses. He was raised again on account of our justification.

Now, notice carefully the words. It is in the death that we are delivered. It is in the death that we have justification but on account of our justification he was raised. In other words, the resurrection is the evidence of the acceptance of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and it seems to me that’s exactly what we have here. He shall pronounce him clean because of the shedding of the blood of the first bird and the bird the live bird goes free over the open field in a visible picture of the cleansing that has come to him. In other words, the bird that flies away is evidence of the fact that the leper now is not only clean internally but has been pronounced clean according to the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. When our Lord Jesus Christ died he accomplished the atonement. When he rose again from the dead on the third day he did not accomplish atonement by that but that was the evidence of the fact that the atonement had been accomplished. It was a finished work. It was God’s way of saying I am satisfied with that which Jesus Christ has done and I accept that as the penalty for the sins of my people. So isn’t that a beautiful picture of one bird slain in token of penal substitutionary sacrifice; the other bird flying off into heavens evidence of the acceptance of the finished work of atonement pictured by the bird.

Now, let’s think about the leper. He’s been standing by the side of the priest all of this time. What has the leper done? Well, the leper has done nothing. As a matter of fact, he’s done nothing from the beginning of the notion of his cleansing. One day he awakened and he discovered that he was clean. He went to the priest. The priest took a look at him pronounced him clean. The sacrifices were offered. He has done nothing and yet he stands cleansed. It is, I think, also pictured further, a further picture of the

thought that the benefits of the atoning of the Lord Jesus Christ do not rest upon anything that we do. He’s kind of a spectator at his own cleansing. Something has happened in him. The priest has pronounced him clean and he has done nothing.

Now, let’s notice the verses that follow. Verse 8, we read, “The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. And it shall be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean.” The important phrase is he may enter the camp. In other words, by virtue of the activity of the priest in the slaughter of the bird and the freeing of the bird typifying our Lord’s death and resurrection now the leper may enter into the company of the people of God and fellowship with them. Return to the camp of Israel. It must have been, incidentally, a great deal for this man that lived apart from friends apart from his family apart from love apart from any touch of anyone near to him for all these days or months or perhaps years but now as a result of this fellowship is restored with the community.

There follows in verse 10 through 20, a section that I’m going to read through because we have a few moments and I want you to notice that this cleansing of the leper is not yet or that is all of the requirements are not yet met. He must now bring certain gifts. These are the things that our Lord was speaking about when he said to the leper go and offer the gifts which Moses commanded. Notice the 10th verse.

“Now on the eighth day he is to take two male lambs without defect.” [This is the eighth day after he’s been pronounced clean.] “And a yearling ewe lamb without defect, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil; and the priest who pronounces him clean shall present the man to be cleansed and the aforesaid before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Then the priest shall

take the one male lamb and bring it for a guilt offering, with the log of oil, and present them as a wave offering before the Lord. Next he shall slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, at the place of the sanctuary for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy. The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. The priest shall also take some of the log of oil.”

Notice as we studied in connection with the cleansing of the priest it is the blood first and then the oil because atonement must take place before those who sins have been atoned for may receive the ministry of the Spirit.

“The priest also shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into his left palm; the priest shall then dip his right-hand finger into the oil that is in his left palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the Lord. And of the remaining oil, which is in his palm, the priest shall put some on the right earlobe of the one to be cleansed.” [Notice it’s on the same place where the blood was placed before it; blood first and then oil.] “And on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the guilt offering.”

He even specifically says this oil is to be placed on the blood of the guilt offering. This is Moses’ way or ultimately God’s way of stressing there is no fellowship of God apart from atoning sacrifice or to put it in the language of our Lord Jesus Christ, “I am the way the truth and the light if no man cometh under the Father but by me.” Or to put in Peter’s words according to Acts 4:12, “There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Or in Paul’s words, “We are justified by faith

because God has through Jesus Christ made him a propitiation for our sins.” All of this so stressed over and over and over again it must very important to God for us to know these truths. Verse 18.

“While the rest of the oil that is in the priest’s palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the Lord. The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. The priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be clean.”

Now, you notice the two-fold aspect of the fellowship. In the case of the two birds, it was by virtue of the two birds that the leper was restored to fellowship with the people of God. He was able to enter into the camp but that is not sufficient. There must be fellowship with God and so the gifts or the animal sacrifices which are brought the guilt offering, the sin offering, the meal offerings, all of these offerings arrive from the earlier of the Book of Leviticus stress the fact that there also must be fellowship with God. And so the gifts that are mentioned here are the gifts that make it possible for the leper to have communion with God. And so the one whose picture, who was a leper, and who in the prescriptions of the Old Testament represented a person who was dead, defiled, out of fellowship with men and God, is now through the atoning the things that picture the atoning work of the Lord Jesus in fellowship with the saints of God, the people of God, and with God himself; a beautiful picture of the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s close our meeting with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these pictures of the Old Testament that beautifully represent our Lord Jesus Christ. How much more meaningful, Lord, are

the incidents in the life of our Lord are as a result of the study of the Old Testament. And we thank Thee that when he cleansed the lepers it was a beautiful testimony to his own divine power and authority as the messiah of Israel. We remember that it was said in the Old Testament that the Messiah when he should come should heal the lepers; that he has come and healed them and we know that he is the Messiah of Israel.

And we thank Thee that being able to heal this incurable disease of leprosy. He is able to heal of the diseases of sin which afflict us. We give Thee thanks and praise for the forgiveness of sins and for the fellowship that we enjoy with Thee and with the people of God. We look forward to the days of eternity in which we shall come to understand in deeper measure all that he has accomplished. Father, if there are some here who have not yet believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that through the Holy Spirit Thou will bring conviction of sin and illumination concerning the death of Jesus Christ and salvation.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.