

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

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How to be whole again. We're in the section of Leviticus that deals with various matters of uncleanness in the Old Testament laws. Chapter 11, uncleanness as related to food. Chapter 12, uncleanness resulting from childbirth. Chapter 13 and 14, uncleanness resulting from skin disease. Chapter 13 defines what a skin disease was and we looked at that last week from the standpoint of what purposes does the skin have and how do we become unclean ourselves. Not in the Old Testament sense but the inward spiritual sense.

Today the passage has to do with what happens when the lepers living outside the camp or a skin-diseased person living outside the camp is cleansed and is readmitted to community. Just to give you a sample of this chapter let me read to you the first eleven verses and then a couple of other selected verses. "The LORD said to Moses, 'These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. The priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields. The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for

## HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN

### Leviticus 14

seven days. On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair; he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean. On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, each without defect, along with three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil. The priest who pronounces him clean shall present both the one to be cleansed and his offerings before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting... If, however, he is poor and cannot afford these, he must take one male lamb as guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for him, together with a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, a log of oil, and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering'... The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your possession, and I put a spreading mildew in a house in that land, the owner of the house must go and tell the priest, "I have seen something that looks like mildew in my house"' (Leviticus 14:1–11, 21–22, 33–35, NIV). Then there's a whole prescription given for what to do with this spreading mildew disease in a house. The New Testament tells us that "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable [underline the word "profitable," profitable for the New Testament saints] for teaching, for correction, for rebuke and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We want to find out how Leviticus 14 is profitable to us. What we do in looking at that is to realize that underneath all the Old Testament regulations there are principles. The regulations may change in their manifestations but the principle doesn't change. It's what we might call a transferable concept. What is there in this Scripture that God means to transfer to us living today? We see how the New Testament and how Jesus and the apostles understood the Old Testament. For example, Jesus takes the food laws of Leviticus 11 and makes the transferable concept in

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

Mark 7 that there is a distinction eternally between clean and unclean. The principle always is there; it never changes. Only the principle, the enduring principle has to do with our inner life and whether out of us are coming clean things or unclean things. The outer thing in the Old Testament was to simply teach us an inward reality.

Paul takes an Old Testament law that said, “Don’t muzzle the ox that treads out the grain” (1 Corinthians 9:9). None of us own oxen so it can’t possibly apply to us. When we look at that regulation it doesn’t really make sense to us. But Paul takes the Old Testament regulation and goes underneath it to the enduring principle. The enduring principle he finds is that those who are engaged in the Lord’s work ought to receive compensation, for their full time is devoted in effect to “treading out the grain.” They therefore ought to profit from the work in which they minister, and not be muzzled.

When we come to Leviticus 14 we want to do the same thing all over again. We want to take transferable concepts. We want to realize that skin diseases in the Old Testament were physical, but in the New Testament they’re relational. We become unclean, as we noted last week, when we fail to reach out to people, and the purpose of God in creating skin was that we’d reach out to people, receive adequate information from people, be adaptable, and be protective toward people. Those were the four points of last week’s message. When we look at this week’s message we want to realize that the camp which is a kind of motif throughout the whole Book of Leviticus is the sign of God’s people being gathered together as a redeemed community. There are some things that begin to move them outside the camp. Skin diseases were one thing to move them out away from the camp and put them on the outside where they were isolated from God and from other people and often isolated within themselves.

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

Leviticus 14 is saying when a person's time of moving away is ended here is what they are to do to come back. When you look at this from our perspective there are various ways that we move away from the center of the camp where God is, is the Old Testament analogy. You see mentally all the tents of Israel spread out and right in the center of the encampment is the Tent of Meeting or the tabernacle. We either move away from the center, or begin to drift out toward the outer edges, or maybe we find ourselves totally removed from a position and a place we've had with God and with His family the church. We ask ourselves, "How is it that we came to be that way?"

#### **I. How do we get removed?**

If we know how we get removed then we know how it is that we get back in. It seems to me as I looked at some things just from my own experience and from persons that I've talked with and shared with and counseled with that there are a lot of reasons but three major reasons it seems to me why people begin to move outside the camp is the presence of sin in our lives which separates us from God and from other people.

**A.** Our own sinful choices remove us. The sinful choice here can be something that's very deliberate and willful, or it can be something that sneaks up on us and is there because our human nature is fallen. And it isn't until after awhile we begin to realize that we acted the way we did because we are living by some old programming that's been running our system.

Often we're running by the tapes we've been preprogrammed to run in our lives. God wants to put new tapes in our life and we're still wanting to live with the old tapes. That describes me.

Times in my life when I move away from people and when I move away from responsibilities, most of the time it's not because it's a deliberate choice, a deliberate decision to do wrong. It's because I run on self-concepts that move me out from God and move me out from people. I must

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

begin, if I'm going to get a hold of my life and mature, begin to realize that that's in my life and I need to work at that and be aware and start to overcome it instead of giving into it.

There are more ways of sinful choices than things like that. There are things that happen in terms of moral choice that bring people away from each other and totally away from God.

**B.** Another way, it seems to me, that we move away from the camp of God's people, where God is, is we move away through wrenching personal experiences which devastate us. We're going along and everything is fine and suddenly a devastating experience happens to us and we feel ourselves removed from God's people. I don't know how many persons I've talked to who have been through a divorce experience who have felt this rejection. Sometimes it's been a real thing on the part of the church and sometimes it's been a rejection they've had that "this horrible thing has happened to me and therefore I can't really be involved in the church anymore. People are looking at me with a judgmental eye." So a person withdraws who's going through a traumatic personal experience.

The church, on the one hand, is caught with this tremendous tension between wanting on the one hand to preserve the family and on the other hand to talk about the grace of God which restores us when we have been broken. On the one hand we're talking about law and on the other hand grace. Sometimes the church itself gets confused in knowing how it should adequately relate to everyone.

The tremendous thing we need to recognize when we have gone through a severe and catastrophic kind of loss is that is the precise time of our life when we most need God's people, when we most need community, when we most need God. The time when we most feel like absenting ourselves is that very time of personal tragedy. Maybe it's an illness and people haven't responded to us the way we thought they should have responded. Maybe it's a loss of

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

some kind and we haven't received the sympathy that we feel we need. So we move away from God and from His people because we somehow feel caved in by that catastrophic thing that has happened in our lives.

C. We also move away from the camp because of our conscious or unconscious decision to move out from God and His people. There's this phrase I've loved in the King James that simply says, "Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom." It's intriguing to look at the time of his life when he did that, when he moved away from Abraham. He and Abraham and their servants, their employees had had a big row with one another. It was out of an argument that Lot moved away. When I look at the life of Christians I see that sometimes it's the case that persons move away from God and move toward the world because of perhaps an unpleasant encounter with someone else in the body of Christ. It moves us away and we get burned. It takes a real process of healing when we have been burnt within Christian community.

If there's a purpose I could plead for Newport Mesa Christian Center is that we be a community where it is easy to be healed. We recognize that in the burn ward there are people that have third-degree burns, second-degree burns, and first-degree burns. Not everybody heals at the same time or in the same way. We seek to be a healing community of the body of Christ together because we recognize that in the body of Christ it's possible that we have done something and maybe haven't been appreciated. We have to realize that when we do that, when we do that we're drowning ourselves in a great deal of self pity and the Lord wants to deal with that too. We can move away because of disagreements, because of conflicts.

Are we as near the center as the time when we first began to follow the Lord? Where are you in regard to the center of the camp in respect to where you were this time last year? Are we moving

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

toward the Lord or away from the Lord? There are things that isolate us and move us away from center. The Lord is always calling us back to the center.

Get your eyes off people and get them on the Lord. I think in the body of Christ we're supposed to be able to look at one another and get good examples. But at the same time if we've had a bad example we need to get our eyes on the Lord.

### **II. How do we become whole again?**

How do we get back if we've withdrawn outside the camp, if we've moved away?

Leviticus 14 tells us how to get back.

**A.** The first thing we have to realize in Leviticus is that a priest meets the skin-diseased person outside the camp. The priest comes outside the camp. That's significant. That's the focus of verses 1–7. In the Old Testament a skin-diseased person could only call for help when his leprosy or skin disease had cleared up. But in the New Testament Jesus comes to people whose leprosy or skin disease has not cleared up at all. In Luke he meets a man who is full of leprosy, meaning he's in the terminal stages. The man has no right to call a priest because his condition hasn't cleared up. He cannot cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" to Jesus. Instead he begs Jesus to heal him. With a priest there was no prospect of success. The priest was simply the health inspector. But with Jesus there was a prospect of success.

There is a liberating word we need to hear when we are outside the camp and when we've been separated from the Lord. The liberating word is "God receives us. God forgives us. God accepts us. He knows where we are." Even in arguments that occur within families where we find ourselves moving away from one another because of conflict and dispute one of the things that really needs to happen to bring a healing situation is that we're willing to step outside and meet a

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

person and reestablish communication even though we feel that they were in the wrong and we were in the right.

Our responsibility in communication is to go out and touch people and begin to heal them verbally and physically with our embrace. Even though we may be the persons who were technically in the right. Jesus says that if you're at the altar and remember while you're there that someone has something against you, first go and be reconciled to the person and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23–24). It's striking. It's not while you're there and you remember you have something against someone—that's not the stress. It's if you remember they have something against you. That is, if you're there in the place of worship and remember that somebody is outside the camp, they're hurting and they're lacking fellowship and you know that you could do something to help bring them in, Jesus is saying go do it. Go outside the camp. Reach out and touch.

The Old Testament priests at this particular moment when they met someone outside the camp had another person bring two clean birds—probably pigeons or doves. One bird was killed and its blood was caught in a clay jar that was filled with fresh water. Then the live bird with cedar and hyssop and scarlet was dipped in the water-blood and some of the blood was sprinkled on the person seven times and then the live bird flew way free. The symbolism of this is simply that the person who has been touched outside the camp had to know that this disease had truly been dealt with and he knew that visually by seeing a dead bird which represented the fact that all of this disease is now dead. And a live bird that flew away showed the person's freedom; he was as free as the bird that was winging across the plain. The blood of the dead bird was sprinkled upon him even as Peter tells us that we have been sprinkled by the blood of Christ to let us know that Jesus has truly touched us outside the camp and has made us whole. We have His grace. If Jesus

## HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN

### Leviticus 14

can meet people outside the camp, not wait for hurting people to come to Him but if He can go where they are, then also in his body God help us to be that kind of way ourselves.

**B.** A second kind of thing of being whole again in this passage is that others are to know about our changed condition. There are really a couple of ways that a community knew that you had come back. If you had been a person outside the camp with skin disease and now you've come back there were two ways that everybody knew that.

First, you came back with all your hair shaved off. Your head, your eyebrows—every hair on your body shaved off.

The second was you came and you lived outside your tent for seven days—you couldn't go in your tent.

It must have been a sight to see all these shaved people not able to go into their tent but living outside. People need to know we're back. The Lord didn't allow anybody who had been outside the camp just to sneak back in. He let everybody know they were back—let them know for a whole week.

I think there's something neat about the Christian community where we can be honest and authentic enough to share what we've been through. One of the traumas with Christian communities is that we are afraid to admit that we have problems. We're afraid to admit that we have struggles because we want to keep this mask of pretense up so that people don't see our real selves. What the Scripture is saying is when we've been isolated it's ok if people know that we were away and know that we're back and we've come back to be reintegrated in what God is doing.

Paul in the book of 2 Corinthians talks about us now with an unveiled face beholding the Lord and being transformed from glory unto glory, in contrast with Moses who kept the veil on his

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

face so that the Israelites couldn't see the fading glory going away. A fascinating insight in the Old Testament that the reason Moses kept the veil on was he wanted people for a while to think he was spiritual even though the wattage was dimming day by day.

How many times in the Christian community do we keep the veil on because we don't want our real selves to show. The Lord says it's ok. You're being changed from glory unto glory. You're in the process of growth. I think it's ok to let others know what has happened to us, to put up with the curious stares and to come back.

**C.** The third thing that is going on in this passage is that God looks for a heart that seeks restitution and rededication. When a person has been outside the camp they come back and the Lord throws the work at them in terms of their opportunity to offer sacrifice. Out of the five sacrifices that Leviticus 1–7 teaches about, the person who comes back from skin disease offers four of them. And they're in a precise order.

The guilt offering is first. It's also called the "trespass offering" or "reparation offering." It is mandated that it must be a lamb. The other offerings you can substitute doves for. But the guilt or trespass offering is mandated as a lamb. When we looked at the trespass offering we saw that it was largely an offering that stood as a symbol of financial payment. If you've robbed something from somebody or cheated somebody you offered the guilt offering as a sign that you were making reparation. Here it's offered because while the person has been outside the camp God has been deprived of their services. They haven't been able to go to the tent at Passover, Pentecost, at the feasts. They haven't been able to keep the prescribed kinds of things. They haven't had an income and therefore haven't been able to tithe. In all these things. God has been deprived of their services, their life, their finances, and they have been outside the camp. So the Lord says, "When you come back in I want you to make an acknowledgement to Me that while

## HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN

### Leviticus 14

you were outside I was deprived of your life and services. So I'm going to require not that you make up all the sacrifices you missed. I'm not going to require you make up all the feasts you missed. I'm just going to require one thing. You make one offering as an acknowledgement that while you were away from Me I suffered loss." That's a fascinating concept. It says that in God's sight we're important. And that when we drop out of service to Him, His word and His name suffer loss. When we come back there's not this "cheap grace" kind of an idea of slipping in and slipping out but a recognition that while we were away God grieved for us and God missed us and He wants us in coming back to recognize that our time away was costly to Him. We mean so much to God He thinks that of us.

Then the other offerings were given. The sin offering for sins of omission. The burnt offering for rededication of all of life to God. The cereal offering, a representation of our work to God. The only offering that's missing is the peace offering, which is surprising. That's the thanksgiving offering. You'd think when you were outside the camp the first thing you'd come back and offer was the thanksgiving offering. God doesn't require a thanksgiving offering. Perhaps why is that He wants it to be optional—volitional—and it's the one thing He didn't require, to give thanks. He wanted us to take care of the other things—reconsecration, rededication when we've been away.

**D.** A fourth thing in this text which I find fascinating: It goes on to talk in verses 33–53 about our physical dwellings needing to reflect the outer wholeness, which corresponds to the inward wholeness in our lives. There's a whole section of what to do if your house catches leprosy. In the NIV it's "mildew." But it's the same kind of thing. It's a skin disease like you can have in your body or clothes. There's a whole passage on if you find this growing, spreading fungus in your house you call the priest and he isolates the part of the wall that it's appearing in. He locks

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

up the house for seven days. Come back at the end of the seven days. If this thing is going away then the house is clean. But if it's spreading then that section of the house is torn out and if it comes back and it's still spreading after seven days the whole house to torn down.

What's the transferable concept here? I think we could spend a whole morning on this. Man is linked up with his environment. Paul talks about the whole creation groaning about the liberation of the children of God. When man fell into sin, creation itself was reduced to being something that it was never designed to be. It's waiting for the time when the glorious liberty of the sons of God will be made manifest and God renews the whole earth. Man is inextricably bound up with his environment.

More particularly: When we look at our homes and where we live what we have around us can be a source of wholeness for us or a source of disease. What could possibly be an analogy for spreading mildew in our homes? It seems that one of the relationship locations of spreading mildew is the television set. I think that "spreading mildew" in a house can even refer to the décor of a home. Whether it fosters a love for God.

There may be an apartment or home where grievous things have taken place. Maybe anger in relationships. Maybe some devastating things that have happened. The Lord wants us to pray a word of peace to settle over that place so that the place begins to cooperate with the spiritual makeup that God has for us in our own personalities. Our environment is cleansed.

These seem to me some of the transferable concepts out of Leviticus 14 for us. When we move away from the center let Jesus meet you where you are. Or call someone to you and let someone meet you where you are and realize that the grace of God is given to you. As you are changed let others know. Let restitution and rededication mark your renewal. Let your outer environment correspond with the inner renewal, which God has done in your heart.

## **HOW TO BE WHOLE AGAIN**

### **Leviticus 14**

#### **Closing Prayer**

Father, it has been a delight again to spend this day, this morning in Your presence. To rejoice in You. We ask, Lord, for persons here today who may in their own experience have been moving away from You or even moving outside the camp or fellowship with You. Perhaps moving away from Your people. Through this Scripture You would cause us to see how much You long for us to be in the center of where You are working, in the center of Your presence with Your people in wholesome and cleansed relationships. We give ourselves to You anew this day in the name of our Lord. Amen.