

## Lord's Supper meditation

Leviticus 11:29-45

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Tonight's exhortation comes to us from Leviticus Chapter 11, and we will be reading from verse 29 to 45. Leviticus 11:29-45. Now I know immediately as I say the book 'Leviticus' some of us in the room start to get a little scared, and that's OK. Out of all the books in the Bible the book of Leviticus isn't probably going to be found in the self-help section of the Christian bookstore. And probably the thought is that when you read it you start to encounter a lot of unfriendly territory that appears to have very little value to you in the present day. I say 'appear to have' because I think the claim that Leviticus has little to offer us would be actually a tremendous oversight on our part. Leviticus is dealing with how a culture responds to the lordship of God. And in that sense we have many things to learn and equate from their culture, the Israelites' culture, to ours.

And so in preparing for this evening's talk I thought it would be appropriate that we examine some of the tension of the scene that we heard from Mark Chapter 2 from Pastor Randy this morning. And in particular, ask ourselves the question of why the Pharisees acted the way they did to Jesus in their rebuke of him having dinner and having fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, and how that can be instructive and devotional for us as we approach the Lord's Supper tonight. So as we read these verses, this may be a passage you've never read before, and there may be some things in here that make you chuckle and laugh a little bit. That's all right. You know, we're living on this side of redemptive history, but I do want us to pay attention to several words that will continue to repeat themselves over and over again as we read these sixteen verses. So are you ready? I'm excited. I'm excited about this, to read about this particular passage. So here we go. Leviticus 11:29-45.

<sup>29</sup> "And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground: the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind, <sup>30</sup> the gecko, the monitor lizard, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. <sup>31</sup> These are unclean to you among all that swarm. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening. <sup>32</sup> And anything on which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any article that is used for any purpose. It must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. <sup>33</sup> And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. <sup>34</sup> Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. <sup>35</sup> And everything on which any part of their carcass falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you. <sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, but whoever touches a carcass in them shall be unclean. <sup>37</sup> And if any part of their carcass falls upon any seed grain that is to be sown, it is clean, <sup>38</sup> but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you.

<sup>39</sup> “And if any animal which you may eat dies, whoever touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening, <sup>40</sup> and whoever eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. And whoever carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>41</sup> “Every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable; it shall not be eaten. <sup>42</sup> Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, any swarming thing that swarms on the ground, you shall not eat, for they are detestable. <sup>43</sup> You shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become unclean through them. <sup>44</sup> For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. <sup>45</sup> For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God). And when we read passages like this and when we see what's in here, all right, some of you may be thinking how is this any way devotional. I don't even know what a monitor lizard is. What is, what is this, what is going on here? And perhaps on the surface level [there] seems to be little application for us following a dietary law that has long since passed since the inauguration of Christ. That however, we have to remind ourselves here that the laws of diet and the laws of diet even on a culture present for us things that we can learn and help to understand as we understand Israel. Right?

In fact, we have many things in our culture that can equate to the way that we relate to food. For example. So I was meaning... I come from a Korean American background, right? That if I saw a head of cabbage, right, someone from my family would look at that and say that's a very nice head of cabbage, right? Let's ferment it with spices and garlic and let's just put it in a pot and not touch it for like, months, all right? Let's just wait until it just sort of settles into a nice flavor and let's eat it then. We think that's an appropriate law for a head of cabbage. OK? But someone coming from, you know, an American culture or Americanized culture would look at that head of cabbage and go, you know what? That's pretty good. Let's just keep it as it is, right, maybe combine it with other vegetables that we keep as it is, and, you know, dump a bunch of ranch sauce on it and there we go. Right? But it's all cultural, right? I mean these both sound like very weird propositions, both of them. Right?

Until you realize that for a culture and the way that it identifies with food, for a country like Israel that had God as its lord, this was a law in here that was given to the people of God to demonstrate their identity as the people of God. So we shouldn't find this passage here to be something that we think has no analog to us today. We shouldn't find the fact that God makes laws about food, about the diet of his people, alarming. It shouldn't alarm us in the same way that it shouldn't alarm us that we have an FDA, a Food and Drug Administration. We are obsessed with cleanliness of our food in our culture. We argue about it, we debate over it. We're obsessed with cleanliness of our homes. The SC Johnson company, one of the richest families in the world at thirty billion dollars, all they do is sell cleaning products. Right? We have

fighting over terminology of our food and what really is true food, right, whether something is truly trans-fat free or what if something is processed or non-processed. I mean, like even right now this week—and this is true—this week there is a conference being held by the FDA in Rockville, right in our backyard, where constituents and researchers and the public will be discussing the word ‘healthy’ and what constitutes ‘healthy food.’ I am not joking about this at all. I mean, from their website... This is a true quote from the website: “The public meeting will give interested parties an opportunity to discuss the use of the term ‘healthy’ in the labeling of human food products. The meeting format will include interviews, presentations, stakeholder perspectives, panel sessions, multiple opportunities for individuals to express their opinions through oral presentations, and breakout sessions. Parties who are unable to participate in person will be able to join the meeting via live Webcast.” I mean, we are obsessed with this, aren't we. We are obsessed with clean. We are obsessed with unclean, just like the people of God would have been in their time.

But more importantly we love making that which is unclean clean again. We don't love doing the chores, but you get what I'm saying. We love to make the unclean clean again. We call athletes and actors and movies ‘clean’ to demonstrate their value and their worth. So you see, when the Pharisees are rebuking Jesus's fellowship with the tax collectors and sinners in Mark Chapter 2, we have to remember that their reasons for being upset with Jesus's fellowship with them aren't archaic and old-fashioned. It's sort of easy to retroactively just think the Pharisees are being so silly here, but their rebukes are based in this value that our society and the Israelites society would have had about this idea of being clean and unclean. You see, God's people before the coming of Christ—every aspect of their lives, as we just read a little snippet here, even food and dress and all different kinds of relationships with people were dictated by this idea of ceremonial, sacrificial, civil laws that covered every aspect of them.

Why? Well it's because of verses 44 and 45 here in this chapter. It's because “For I am the LORD your God,” you see. This means that they do indeed care whether or not they have a mole rat for dinner, whether an unclean food touches their stove. Why? Because they are worried about what becomes unclean and how it can become clean again. It presented an identity for them that was supposed to be rooted in the Lord and his holiness and his ways and his power and his majesty. It was never meant to be self-serving. It was never meant to be a source of self-righteousness. But you see, the unfortunate turn that happens in the Israelite culture, and really with the Pharisees here, is that they started to view verses like these as symbols and signs of their own personal self-worth. The following of these laws—not just these laws, but the hundreds and hundreds of laws that were written for the people in the time, the Mosaic Law in the time in the Old Testament. They started coming up with these categories of this is clean and this is unclean, and they started adding rules and regulations on to what they believed was appropriate. And so yes, sure, the Pharisees could point to passages in the Levitical Law that would have needed to be pointed to, the idea that these tax collectors needed to repent and that these sinners were unclean. Sure, they would have had grounds for doing so.

But what the Pharisees have forgotten in understanding of God's law is that they forgot that the Levitical Law was not just meant to condemn, but it was to give a process for a restoration for how people can go from being unclean to clean. It's here even in the sixteen verses. How does the unclean food become clean? How do the things that the unclean food touches become clean

again? They couldn't see what God was doing to make the unclean clean. They couldn't see in Jesus's fellowship with the tax collectors and the sinners how the very redemptive work that he was there—just by sharing a meal with them—could make them clean again.

And we don't have to imagine what this might look like for us to live in the Pharisee's time with their thoughts and minds, because we sort of have the same mentality today, don't we. We remember all the exhortations of doing in Scripture and all the commandments that we have to follow growing up and all the things that we were told that God would be displeased with if we didn't follow perfectly. But rarely do we ever—and this is something that we need to be reminded of over and over again—rarely do we ever think about the 'who' of what makes us righteous, the 'who' of who we are in relation to God and also the relation to the law. We only think about the 'do' as Brian Chapell famously writes in his book, Unlimited Grace.

You see, any time you get a chance to read the law in the Old Testament, notice the amount of time that God doesn't just simply give the Israelites a task of what not to do, but what God also allows them to do to trust in him again to make them clean, what God shows and demonstrates about his character in providing restoration for his people. For this is what the Pharisees completely neglect. They fail to see themselves as one who needed the 'who,' because they thought that they were the doers of the law. They believed that they deserved the righteousness of God. And by extension they believe that they were the judges who should be able to give out judgment to those who weren't. This is exactly why Jesus makes the rebukes that he does in Matthew Chapter 23. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."

Everything in the culture of the Pharisees which is formed by God's law and yet not ultimately glorifying to the Lord shows how it could be possible for us to live an entire life living in the highest of God's ideals and yet have none of its life-giving power. Because in the end, it's really not about the glory of God, it's about ourselves. It's like Instagramming fake food. Sure, it might look good to the people that you're posting it to. You might get a lot of likes. No one may even notice. But deep down inside you know it's toxic for you and your soul. It only appears to be clean, but it isn't clean at all. And I can just imagine the Pharisees' rebuke to Jesus. *Jesus, I thought you were all about following the law. No jot or tittle, remember? Why share a food and a meal with that which is unclean? Why would you [have] fellowship with unrepentant sinners?* They forget verse 45, the reminder of why Jesus would do this: "For I am the Lord your God." Jesus would rather enjoy this fellowship to redeem many [than] live in a world that is superficially righteous and self-serving.

And that's instructive for us here today. The Pharisees forgot they were once a people who had no claim to God himself, that God sat down and brought them to himself, fed them manna, gave them life-giving drink from miraculous sources. The Pharisees were so obsessed with their own self-righteousness and purity of their outward signs that they forgot that they were once a people not deserving to sit at the table of the Lord. This is the amazing proclamation of the gospel to each and every single one of us today. That whether the lens of life that you

experience is one of you feel like you're unworthy to sit at the table of Christ, or maybe perhaps you may feel a sense of self-righteousness and pride from feeling like yeah, I've done it, I've followed the law. The table is here for both of us here today. Leviticus calls us and reminds us that it is not us, in our lack of righteousness or our faithfulness in righteousness, that allows us to approach this table here today. It is Christ himself that makes and gives us that access. Jesus comes to you today and offers you, a sinner, a meal. That's what the Lord's Supper is all about.

So as we share in these elements it is my hope and prayer that we could just do some real digging down, some soul searching in our lives. What are we claiming as a righteousness of our own, whether it be through our works or our acts? How are we viewing others in that great sin of comparison? And instead, can we shift our eyes to Christ who sits with both of them.

Let's pray together. Father, I ask that you would, through this meal, remind us again, Lord, that it is you who calls and declares us to be clean. Father, it is the gospel's great reminder to us that Lord, you provide that means for us—though we are unclean, though we live in our sin, we are undeserving of your grace. You are our Lord our God who redeems us and saves us. You are holy, and you make us holy. Thank you for this time in your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.