Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In some ways, everything that has happened in recent months in regards to **Covid 19** gives us something of a reference point for Leviticus 13-15. We have experienced a highly contagious disease pandemic and lockdowns and close contacts and managed isolation, etc. So this helps us better understand the health side of things in these chapters. And we have also been through the **leaky homes crisis** of recent years; we understand that mould and mildew in a house are also not good for health. But not all of the conditions described in chapters 13-15 were contagious, and some of the things referred to in chapter 15, such as menstruation, have nothing to do with disease, or, in the case of sexual intercourse within marriage, are actually perfectly good and healthy activities. So while health may be a part of what these chapters are about, something else is the chief concern here.

And by now we should know that the chief concern of all of Leviticus is **holiness**. God is holy, which means perfect, good, righteous, and pure, and He can only live among a holy people. So the first 10 chapters were about offerings for sin committed by the people; the offerings took away the guilt of sin and returned the people to a state of holiness, so that God could remain among them. But the concern of chapters 11-15 is wider, if you like; it is what is referred to as **uncleanness**. You see, holiness is not just about things we do or do not do, it also about our nature; our condition; about life in a Fallen or sin-contaminated world. The People of Israel needed to understand that every aspect of life was affected by sin; even things that were good in and of themselves. So this general uncleanness also was not to come into the tabernacle area, because God is holy. Look at **chapter 15:31**: “*Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst*.” So uncleanness had to be dealt with or kept outside the tabernacle area. And if an unclean person came to the tabernacle, that would become a sinful act that the Lord would deal with by destroying the individual. That’s how serious this was. So with the regulations of these chapters, the Lord is expanding His people’s understanding of holiness.

Now, you and me live in the same fallen world and God is still holy and we must be holy. But, **the Lord Jesus has come**. And He told us that He came to fulfill the law – including the laws of chapters 13-15. And we are going to see how Jesus fulfilled these laws. And that will help us understand how the principles of holiness taught here remain for us today.

So let’s consider the **gospel lessons that arise out of laws for disease and discharges**. And as we heard, there is a lot of repetition in this passage and a lot of it self-explanatory. So I will summarize these **disease** and **discharge** laws, and explain a few aspects of the laws, and then we will spend most of our time considering a number of Gospel implications that arise from these chapters.

1. So first of all, chapters 13-14 and **Disease**.
   1. And as we read, verses 1-46 describe a variety of skin conditions called “**leprosy**.”
      1. Now, what we today call leprosy is actually a condition known as Hansen’s disease. It is a very serious condition that still exists in some parts of the world and until quite recently it was incurable and led to death. And most Bible scholars agree that what we today call leprosy is not what chapter 13 is describing. The symptoms of today’s leprosy do not match what is described here and today’s leprosy may not even have existed until much later in history. So what is likely to be in view here are skin conditions like severe *eczema* and *psoriasis*, and an infection called *favus* that affects the skin around head and beard hair. But whether it was a sudden local eruption, or a chronic skin condition, or a boil of some sort, or burn-related, or on the scalp or the beard, or white spots on the skin, you had to book an appointment, *not with the doctor*, but with **the priest**.
         1. And just that fact emphasizes the *religious* aspect of all this over the health aspect. They key concern here was ritual uncleanness; not bringing uncleanness inside the tabernacle area.
         2. And what the priest had to work out was if this fit the diagnosis of a leprous disease. So he was to assess the symptoms described in these sections. And if there was any doubt, the person was put in managed isolation for seven days and then the skin condition was checked again.
         3. But eventually he had to rule on whether the person was clean or unclean.
      2. Now, if the person was clean, they could carry on with normal life and enter the tabernacle area, but if they were unclean, **verses 45-56** explain that they had to wear torn clothes, let the hair on the head hang loose, cover the mouth, cry out ‘unclean, unclean,’ whenever they saw another person, and go and live alone outside the camp for as long as the disease remained.
         1. And we will say more about these consequences when we come to look at the gospel implications but the key point here is that **everything described in verses 45-46 has to do with mourning and death**. There is no doubt that these measures had public health in view. Lepers lived in quarantine and covering your upper lip was basically wearing a mask! So these measures limited the spread of disease. But more importantly than that, as we have repeatedly stated in our sermons on chapters 11 and 12, God is a God of life and perfection. His original, pre-fall creation, was a place of life and health. Disease and death are post-fall realities. **So the person with a leprous disease was a symbol of sin and death**. Because this disease was deep under the skin and because it spread and changed how the skin was supposed to look, it was a symbol of sin and death.
         2. So where the person had to live and how they dressed and what they had to do were all symbols of mourning and death. This was a vivid and shocking reminder to the people of Israel that they lived in a fallen world. And it should have led them to long for and pray for coming of Messiah who would repair this fallen creation.
   2. Well, **verses 47-59** are about leprous types of conditions that affected clothing or fabric or leather – mould and mildew. And while this does have health implications, again, the primary concern was ritual uncleanness. Look at verse 59: This is about determining whether the item was clean or unclean. Mould and mildew are symbols of the corruption of sin that has infected creation. And if anyone came into contact with these unclean items was not to enter the tabernacle area, lest they die. And so, God explained how to deal with the infected item – they had to be “*burned in the fire*.”
   3. Well, in chapter 14 we first of all see the rules for **how to restore a *person* who was healed of his leprous disease**. So, while some may have lived as lepers their whole lives, others experienced healing. And if they did, this is what had to be done to restore them to life among the people of Israel, including participation in tabernacle worship.
      1. And notice, from verse 3, that it began **outside the camp**; the priest had to go outside the camp to investigate the claim of healing.
      2. And if there was healing, there was **the two birds ceremony** that is described in verses 4-7, then shaving his hair and bathing.
      3. Then he could come back into the camp, but he had to live outside his tent for seven days. On the seventh day, he shaved his hair again, and his beard and eyebrows, and then washed again, and was now clean and able to return to life in the community and tabernacle worship.
      4. So the next day, the eighth day, as we see from **verses 10-32**, he had to go to the tabernacle and **offer four sacrifices** to the Lord – a guilt offering, a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a grain offering.
      5. And included in these offerings was the curious ritual of having some of the blood put on the ear lobe and the big toe and the thumb, and some oil on the head, all symbols of complete healing and restoration.
      6. And only after all of this, as we see in **verses 20 and 31**, was atonement made, such that the man was completely clean or holy.
   4. And then, finally, in terms of disease, **verses 33-57** are the laws for cleansing a house that had some sort of fungal mildew growth. At this time in Israel’s history, the people lived in tents. So what we saw in chapter 14 about mildew in fabric and skins would have applied to tents. But here it is stone and plaster houses that are in view. So the Lord is looking forward to when the people will live in cities in the Promised Land. And again, the priest was looking for something that was deep-set and spreading; that symbolized sin and death. And again, the infected area had to be removed and destroyed, which, in the worst case, as verse 43ff explains, could mean destroying the whole house! There was to be no uncleanness among God’s holy people.
2. So there we have it; those are the laws about disease. The concern of chapter 15 is **Discharges**. Are you ready? ☺
   1. Well, without going into any of the details, the discharges in view in this chapter are all some sort of **genital discharge**. And the chapter is structured so that male discharges, of both the abnormal, ongoing, disease type, and the temporary and normal, non-disease type, are mirrored by the normal, non-disease type and the abnormal, ongoing, disease types of discharges in females. And this perfect balance emphasizes the unity of the sexes, with the centre of the chapter, verse 18, describing the one-flesh union of husband and wife. For such a delicate subject, it really is quite beautifully done.
      1. Most commentators indentify diseases like gonorrhoea and syphilis as the chronic conditions that affected males and long term bleeding as that which affected females.
      2. And again, while there were health concerns with what included contagious diseases, the main thing in view here is ritual uncleanness. And this is not to suggest in any way that marital intercourse is unclean. However, as we saw last week in relation to chapter 13, what God designed as an act of purity and perfection was now affected by the corruption of sin. So again, wanting to be delicate and not wanting to speculate, we can surmise that before the Fall there would have been no excess or wastage of the body’s sexual fluids, which there is after Fall. Hence the uncleanness.
      3. And so, there was need for these rules about being unclean until evening or for seven days after healing occurred, and washings and offerings, depending on which discharge was in view.
      4. And look again at **verse 31**: “*Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst*.” If anyone was unclean because of any of these discharges, coming to the tabernacle area would be a sinful act that would bring death.
      5. And very quickly, one side-effect of these regulations would have been **to restrain sexual immorality**. The surrounding pagan nations were famous for temple prostitution and orgies and every sexual immorality there is. But God said to His people, even intercourse between a husband and wife, which He designed as very good, left them unclean until the evening. And you need to understand that the people could be summoned to the tabernacle at any time. But if a husband and wife did not attend, everyone knew why, and that was OK. But if there was someone who was not married who didn’t want to attend, or a husband whose wife couldn’t understand why he didn’t want to go the tabernacle, when she knew that they had not slept together the night before, there would have had a lot of explaining to do.
      6. So, chapter 15 is about ritual uncleanness, health, and restraining immorality.
3. Well, it almost seems like an appropriate moment to pass around some hand sanitizer, doesn’t it. You’re probably keen for this sermon to just be done and over with. But people of God, if we truly believe what **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, that “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*,” then we can’t avoid a passage like this; we need to understand how it is a part of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. So, now that we have summarized this passage, let’s look at some of the gospel implications that arise from it.
   1. And the first one comes from our earlier readings in Mark’s Gospel where **Jesus healed** a man who had a leprous disease and a woman with a blood discharge. And we will focus on the healing of the leper.
      1. And we can get to the key point straight away. Did you notice in Leviticus that while the priest could diagnose the disease, he could not cure it? There is nothing in these chapters about treatments or medicine. And that is because it was understood that only God can heal leprosy. And while prophets healed lepers, they did it in God’s name and power. But Jesus healed them Himself. So that means? He is God! That’s the major point of the healing account – Jesus is God!
      2. But I want us to walk through the healing episode. Hopefully, you now understand the laws in Leviticus 13-15. But I want us to ***feel these laws***. So I am going to read from a sermon I found on the web. I have made some tiny edits but I think this pastor really helps us understand the painful reality of what these laws meant for the people of Israel. So…

*Imagine a man. He is in his mid thirties … He has a beautiful wife and [four] adorable little children, with a [fifth] one on the way. His marriage has had its ups and downs, but he and his wife always seem to work things out. He has a good job, and his own piece of land. He’s building a nice house on it … One day he comes home from work and shows his wife a small sore that developed on his hand … It’s not real painful, but it does keep him from working on his house that evening.*

*He takes it easy at work for a couple of days, but the sore just keeps getting larger and larger... After a few days however, they both get alarmed, and she persuades him to go see a person in town who knows about such things. This person isn’t a doctor, but he has been trained in the area of skin infections and things of that sort. This man looks at it … and says, “It’s hard to determine what this is. I have a few theories, but I want to be sure. So I need you to stay here for two weeks so I can observe this sore.”*

*So that is what they do. And for two weeks, the sore gets bigger and bigger, until it almost covers his whole hand. It becomes white around the edges. It … looks horrible. At the end of two weeks, the man with the … training says to the younger man, “I have figured out what it is you have. I am sorry to inform you that you have…leprosy. You are going to have to leave your wife and children, your land, your home, your job, and go off to live with the other lepers out behind the town.”*

*Hearing this, the man is terrified. It [could be] a death sentence … But this is not what terrifies the man … What he is afraid of is the complete separation and isolation that is about to begin. Although the physical ravages of leprosy are bad, the mental and emotional damage it causes is even worse.*

*[Lepers] were required to keep as far away from all healthy people as possible. Whenever someone drew near who did not have leprosy, the leper was supposed to shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” Lepers are never allowed to be near their loved ones again [unless they are healed].*

*But this man’s leprosy hadn’t gone very far yet. Maybe he could go home one last time. He desperately wants to tell his loved ones goodbye. He wants to tell them one last time that he loves them, and that he will always be thinking of them. “Let me go home and tell them goodbye” he begs. “Let me give my wife one last kiss.”*

*“I’m sorry,” says the other man. “You cannot … go home. You [may] never hold your wife in your arms again. You [may never] wrestle with your sons again. You [may] never kiss your little girls goodnight again. If you see them, and touch them, they may get leprosy themselves. If you love them, you will never get near them again.”*

*So the man goes off. Alone. [Possibly] to die. He couldn’t even have an animal for a companion. If he patted the head of a dog, the dog had to be killed so that it did not carry the disease back into the city. This man truly lived a horrible life.*

*His family would come and bring him food every day. But they couldn’t get close. They would leave it at a certain place on a rock and when they withdrew, he would go pick it up and eat it. In this way, he watched his children grow up, yet was never able to touch them. He watched his wife cry as she left the food, but he was never able to comfort her. After several years of this, he started wishing they wouldn’t come any more. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to see them…it was that he didn’t want them to see him [diseased] … According to Jewish law, he wore rags for clothes, his hair was to be uncovered and disheveled, and he covered his face with a cloth (Lev. 13:45).*

*He … didn’t want his family to remember him this way. Some days, he just wished he would die. [But] one day, something happened that this man and his family would never forget.*

And we know what that something was – He was healed by Jesus! And congregation, this healing was amazing! No one had been healed of leprosy since Naaman, around 750 years before this!

But think back to what we read in Mark: “*And a leper came to [Jesus], imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."*” For years, maybe, this man had avoided people. And if that was not possible, all he said was “unclean, unclean!” The punishment for not saying “unclean, unclean” was a severe beating by the civil authorities and having stones thrown at him by the people. But he had either seen Jesus heal people or heard about him. So faith overcame fear. His absolute belief that Jesus could heal Him made any risk worth taking. And having not experienced the loving touch of a clean person, probably for years, the man was touched by Jesus and immediately healed. And as we read in Mark 5, the same thing happened with the woman who had the bleeding – she was healed by Jesus. These are eyewitness accounts. They really happened! Jesus is God!

* 1. The second gospel implication has to do with **Jesus and the priests**. You will remember from Mark that after the leper was healed, Jesus said to him, “*See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded*.”
     1. Jesus had not yet offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, which would end the need for all other ritual sacrifices, including the cleansing of leprosy. So this man was still under obligation to obey the law of Leviticus 14.
     2. But, what should have happened when this man and other lepers that Jesus healed and the woman He healed went to the priests and told them what Jesus had done? They should have recognized that Jesus was the Promised Messiah!
     3. Well, I am telling you, today, that Jesus healed lepers and the blind and the lame. He even raised people from death! But more than that, He died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and He rose again from the dead. He is the Son of God. He came to save us from our sins and an eternity in hell.
     4. God still says, “*Be holy for I am holy*.” But in and of ourselves, we are not holy; we are unholy sinners. We deserve to die and to burn in hell for all eternity. But God sent Jesus, His Son, to earth. And Jesus lived a holy life, obeying all God’s commandments. And He took our sins on Himself and endured God’s wrath on the cross. So **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, “*For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.” Have you received Jesus as your Saviour and Lord?
  2. We see the same message in the third gospel implication, which arises out of **the two bird ceremony** of chapter 14. One bird was killed. It took the place of the leper, who, as a sinner, just like you and me, deserved to die. And the other bird, the living one, was dipped in the blood of the dead one and the blood was sprinkled on the cleansed leper, and then it was set free in an open field. And I am sure you can see the symbolism of baptism and the removal of sin and all its consequences. And then the cleansed leper had to shave all the hair from his body and wash. So he was, effectively, like a new born baby; he had been ‘born again’!
     1. Well, the New Testament points us to Jesus and His blood as how our sins are truly forgiven. And I am pretty sure that there are no lepers among us but there will be those who carry an enormous burden of guilt because of sins they have committed. Jesus said, “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest … you will find rest for your souls*.” And while the laws about leprosy included this ceremony for cleansing, **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*.”
     2. Do you want rest from guilt? Do you want freedom from sin’s mastery? Do you want to be a new creation? Then confess your sin and believe in Jesus!

* 1. The fourth gospel implication is that because of what the blood of Christ makes us, we **must be wholly committed to holiness**. Uncleanness in the body kept a person away from the Lord’s presence. And even the houses of Israel needed to be cleansed of mildew, because it represented sin and death. Well, **1 Corinthians 6:18-20** says, “*Flee from sexual immorality … Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*.” Is there uncleanness in your life? Is there sexual immorality or other ongoing sin that you need to flee from? Last Sunday I mentioned the group we are beginning to seek freedom from the sin of pornography. And if this is a sin you struggle with, you need others to be accountable to and to support you in seeking freedom. So take our study today as a spur to strive for holiness in every area of life.
  2. And that brings us, fifthly and finally, to an implication that we have repeatedly noted in our Leviticus studies, which is that we should **long for and pray for the return of Jesus and the new heavens and the new earth**. Brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, there are many wonderful things in this life. Praise God! But the consequences of sin are deep-set and wide-ranging and beyond even our ability to comprehend. So keep praying that Jesus would come back soon.

And all God’s people said, Amen.