Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am pretty sure most of you know what KFC is? Do you know that KFC stands for Kentucky Fried Chicken? Well, if we were Jews, living back in Old Testament times, according to the food laws we have just read, KFC was OK to eat; chickens were clean. And KFL – lamb, and KFB – beef, and KFV – venison – were also OK. But KFC – camel, and KFW – weasel, were not OK to eat; they were unclean. And you were also allowed to eat grasshoppers and tuna fish, but you were not allowed to eat Eagles or Eels.

And of course, the obvious questions that arise from this chapter are: Why did God give Israel these laws? And why were some animals and birds and fish OK and not others? And then, as fascinating as all this might be, what on earth do these laws have to do with Jesus Christ and Christian living?

Well, before we study this chapter together, let’s begin with a few context or background observations that will aid our study.

1. Chapter 11 begins a **new section** of the Book that gives rules about uncleanness. And this will continue through to the end of chapter 15. And if you have been here since we began this sermon series, you might be thinking that Leviticus is a book of laws. There were seven chapters of laws about offerings and now we have six chapters of laws about uncleanness! But the laws about offerings were preparation for what we read in chapters 8-10 about the ordination of the priests and the first worship service; chapters 8-10 wouldn’t have made sense without the laws for the offerings. And it is the same with these next six chapters. In **chapter 10:10**, God said to Aaron, “*Distinguish between the … unclean and the clean*,” and teach this to the people. And in the middle of chapter 16 we will read: “*Thus [Aaron] shall make atonement … because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel*.” So chapters 11-15 are preparation for chapter 16; chapter 16 wouldn’t make sense without the rules about uncleanness. So the laws of chapters 1-7 and 11-15 are important, but they are ‘background explanation,’ if you like, for the even more important events described in chapters 8-10 and 16.
2. But stepping back even further than Leviticus, I wonder if the divisions in this chapter reminded you of **the creation account**? For at creation, we read about God creating the land, the water, and the sky, and then filling the land with animals, the water with fish, and the sky with flying creatures. And we have those same three categories here in chapter 11. And this is an important connection, as we shall see.
3. And related to this, here is **a question for you boys and girls**: How many of each kind of animal was Noah told to take onto the Ark? If you are thinking ‘two’ you are *mostly* correct. Listen to what God said to Noah: “*Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals … and a pair of the animals that are not clean … and seven pairs of [each kind of clean] bird [and a pair of each kind of unclean bird]*.” And we learn the reason why there were extra of the clean variety in **chapter 8**: After the flood, when Noah came out of the Ark, he “*built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar*.” So the extra clean animals and birds were sacrificed to the Lord. And we have noted this because it reveals that **the concept of clean and unclean animals and birds did not begin with Israel and Leviticus 11**; it already existed way back in Noah’s day. And as we shall see, it has its origins in Creation and the Fall, and helps us understand the laws of Leviticus 11.

So chapter 11 is a ‘**holy menu**,’ if you like; this is where God explained what could be eaten and what could not be eaten. And as we consider this ‘holy menu,’ our four points will be: Be Careful What You **Eat**, Be Careful What you **Touch**, Be **Holy**, and then we will finish with **some ‘Holy Menu’ lessons for today**.

1. So we begin with verses 1-23 and ‘**Be Careful What You Eat**!’
   1. And remembering what we noted before about the creation parallels, the first part of the eating instructions is **verses 1-8** and the **animals on the land**. And the rule was: “*Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud*,” could be eaten.
      1. And the only examples given in this section are animals that were unclean and therefore not to be eaten: Camels, rock badgers, hares, and pigs. But there is a parallel chapter to this one in **Deuteronomy. 14**. It mentions cattle, sheep, goats, deer, gazelles, roebucks, wild goats, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep as animals that were clean and able to be eaten.
      2. So if a land animal had ‘feet’ that fully divided in two, *and* it chewed its food and swallowed it and then regurgitated it and chewed on it again until it was fully digested, which is what chewing the cud means, it was clean. But it had to have both! Verses 4-7 are examples of animals that chewed the cud or had cloven hooves, but not both. Therefore, they were unclean.
   2. And then, **verses 9-12** are eating instructions about **what lives in the water**. And the rule was simple: Eat only what has “*fins and scales*.”
      1. And neither here nor in Deut. 14 are any specific water creatures mentioned. And that is because the rule is very simple to understand. Salmon and Tuna and Trout were fine, but not eels or prawns or crabs or squid or mussels or sharks or seals or turtles.
      2. And notice that the unclean sea creatures are described here with a term even stronger than unclean – “**detestable**.” Other English versions use the word ‘abomination.’ And we will come back to why this is so later on.
   3. But next we have **verses 13-23** and instructions about **flying creatures** in the sky.
      1. And there is a long list here of birds that are detestable, same word, and not to be eaten. And we should note here that some of the specific names of the animals, and especially the birds mentioned here and in Deut. 14, are **best guesses** about the Hebrew words. There is even a note that says such in our ESV Bibles. And that is because Moses wrote these words around 3600 years ago, and there were no photos then and birds he mentioned might have become extinct since he wrote. But regardless of the *exact* animal or bird in view, we get what is in view from the categories.
      2. And it is not just birds in view for **flying insects**, like ladybirds or some beetles, are also mentioned as unclean. The exceptions are insects like locusts and crickets and grasshoppers. And boys and girls, who is the most famous example of eating locusts in the Bible? **John the Baptist**. **Matthew 3:4** tells us that John was preaching in the wilderness and that while there “*his food was locusts and wild honey*.” And the reason that insects like locusts were OK to eat is given in **verse 21**: They “*have jointed legs above the feet, with which to hop on the ground*.” And again, we will come back to why this distinction is made later on.
2. So those are the rules about what may be eaten. But the second major section, **verses 24-42**, amount to: **Be Careful What You Touch**!
   1. And I am pretty sure that you boys and girls hear this from your parents all the time – don’t touch that, don’t touch this! And since March of this year we have worn gloves at times and we have gone through litres of hand-sanitizer. And this is all so that we do not get germs on our hands and then get sick in one way or another. But while hygiene would have been a part of God’s laws, more important was ritual cleanness. There were warnings not to touch anything that had died back in chapter 5, but here the Lord goes into much more detail.
      1. The first category of things that were not to be touched was **the** **carcasses of *unclean* animals**, as is spelled out in **verses 24-28**. The Israelites were allowed to have dogs or cats at home, or to ride on a camel, all of which were unclean animals, but if they died, anyone who came into contact with it would become unclean.
         1. And notice **verse 26**’s further explanation about clean animals – the hoof had to be completely divided in two, not just have a split at the front.
      2. The next category of things not to be touched was the **carcasses of *unclean* *swarming* things**. And there is a long list of these in verses 29-30. If you touched them, you became unclean.
         1. And if you look through that list there is a good chance that you have seen the dead bodies of things like this in your house at some time. Yes? Mice, lizards, and spiders, etc, come inside our houses and die, and they used to do the same back in the days of Leviticus. Have you ever lifted the lid on a pot or moved something in the shed or the pantry and seen a dead cockroach, or something like that? Yuck! Well, it happened back then, also. And **verses 32-38** explain exactly what you were to do with whatever the dead animal or insect had touched.
      3. Well, the next category of things not to be touched was **the carcasses of *clean* animals**, as stated in **verses 39-40**. So even though an animal or a bird or a fish may have been clean and edible, if it was dead when you found it, it was unclean and not to be touched.
         1. And just in case any of you are wondering about the sacrificial animals that the people of Israel had to kill, those animal carcasses, *because they were offerings*, did not make the offerer or priest unclean.
   2. But what dominates this whole section can really be summed up in one word – **death**. It didn’t matter whether the animal was unclean or clean, death made its carcass unclean, which would contaminate anyone and anything that touched it. And there is a very important creation and salvation lesson in this truth: **Death is an awful intruder**. At the end of day 6 of creation, the earth was full of *living* animals and birds and fish and humans, and it was all “*very good*,” according to God. And when God gave Adam the command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the punishment threatened was the worst thing possible – “*you shall surely die*.” So death was not a part of God’s very good creation; it intruded or rudely came in after the Fall. And it doesn’t matter whether it is a pet that dies or a loved one, death is horrible, isn’t it. And so, contact with death made the Old Testament believer unclean. Death was not normal; it was an unclean thing; it is detestable.
      1. And congregation, that makes the relationship of Jesus to death astonishing!
         1. In the first place, taking to Himself a **human nature** meant that He would die, just as we die.
         2. And during His public ministry, we read about occasions like this one: A ruler came to Jesus and told Him that his daughter had died. When Jesus came to His house, “*He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose*.” So Jesus deliberately touched the dead! That is something the Pharisees never did!
         3. And **Philippians 2:8** says, “[Jesus] *humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*.” So Jesus died a detestable type of death.
         4. But He did this, the Bible explains, so that whoever believes in Him might have eternal … what? Eternal life!
         5. And so, pointing forward to the Second Coming of Jesus and eternal life, **1 Corinthians 15:54-57** says, “*Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Jesus conquered death on the cross!
         6. And a time is coming when there will be no more death for God’s people. **Revelation 21:4** puts it this way: “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more*.”
      2. So the ‘Do not touch death laws’, here in Leviticus 11, should make us yearn for the time when death will be no more. But this promise is only for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour! Do you?
3. Well, the third major section, **verses 41-47**, are where we see the reason for this ‘holy menu.’ And our heading for this section is simply, **Be Holy**!
   1. When you read commentaries about this chapter, they typically choose one of **four reasons** for this ‘holy menu.’
      1. The first reason is that there really is **no reason** other than ‘just because God said!’ So these food laws were a simple test of obedience – would the people obey these food laws or not? And what this view has going for it is that it promotes the glory of God; He does not owe us a reason for His laws. He is God and we are His creatures. And yet, as we shall see, He did give reasons for these laws in this chapter.
      2. The second reason is that the unclean animals and birds, etc, all had **associations with the pagan worship practices** of the surrounding nations. And what this view has going for it is that the command not to be like the pagan nations is found throughout the law. However, while it seems to work with some of the unclean animals and birds, etc, there are exceptions both on the clean and unclean side of the lists.
      3. The third reason is **hygiene**. And the idea here is that all of the unclean animals and birds, etc, were more likely to be the sources of disease than the clean animals and birds, etc. But again, while this may be true of some of the animals, it is not true of all of them.
      4. The fourth reason is **symbolism**. And the idea here is that all of the clean animals and birds and fish were symbols or illustrations of purity and how the people of Israel should live, while the unclean animals and birds and fish were symbols of sin and how the people should not live. And while there are elements of the first three reasons in this ‘holy menu,’ this reason, symbolism, best fits the explanations given in this chapter and the context of the Bible.
         1. In **verses 44-45**, the people were to be holy, which means pure and set apart from the people of the world, because God is holy and because He brought them out of Egypt.
         2. But we have already noted that the concept of clean and unclean animals was already there in Noah’s day. And we have noted that the three spheres of land, water, and sky, **remind us of creation**.
         3. And now I want to read some of the words of **verses 41-42**: God said that “*every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable; it shall not be eaten. Whatever goes on its belly*…” is detestable. Does that language remind you of one particular creature mentioned at the Fall? The serpent who deceived Adam and Eve. After the Fall, we are told that the Lord said to the serpent, “*Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life*.” So before the Fall, the serpent had been some sort of upright creature, eating plants, but after the Fall, it slithered on its belly, and ate the dust. So it went from being a symbol of good animal to a symbol of evil animal.
         4. So putting all of this together, we see that **the Fall affected the whole animal kingdom**. Prior to the Fall, there were land creatures and water creatures and sky creatures that fit perfectly in each category and only ate plants of one sort or another. So you had only cloven-hooved and chewing the cud animals on the land, and only fin and scale fish in the sea, and only plant-eating birds and winged insects in the sky. But after the Fall, there were meat and blood-eating animals, and animals with paws that were similar to human hands, and creatures that were on land *and water*, and sea creatures that ate other fish, and all of the animals and insects that eat dead animals and the dust, and that swarm around, rather than travel in one direction, like normal. Do you get the picture? There was now confusion and chaos and mixture and detestable practices in the animal kingdom. And animals that reflected this were unclean. But the land creatures and water creatures and sky creatures that were still perfectly suited to each of those domains were clean/pure, and able to be eaten.
            1. And this explains why, for example, locusts were clean and able to be eaten. First, they ate plants, and second, they had joints above their hind feet – so two, proper legs, suitable for the land.
            2. But beetles, on the other hand, ate dung and they didn’t have ‘proper legs.’ So they weren’t ‘proper’ sky creatures or ‘proper’ land creatures. So they were unclean.
         5. Now, the point is not to get into detailed arguments about exactly how this animal or that insect fits into each category, but that the effects of the Fall were seen even in the animal kingdom. I have said this before but I believe what has just been said is why most people fear sharks and snakes and spiders and rats! They are creepy and deadly and dirty, which is why they were unclean.
         6. So the Lord allowed the people of Israel to eat animals that symbolized right behaviour in their sphere of creation, while they were not to eat the animals that symbolized sin and its consequences.
4. And that brings us, fourthly and finally, to **Christian living lessons** from the ‘Holy Menu.’
   1. **Romans 8:19-21** says, “*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*.” The holy menu of Leviticus 11 is a reminder that sin has contaminated and infected the whole of creation. But it will not always be like this. One day, Jesus will return to earth and bring with Him a **new creation**! And this new creation is described like this in **Isaiah 11**: “*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea*.” You see? There will no longer be the chaos and confusion and death that infects all of creation now. And this is further reason to keep praying that the Lord Jesus would return soon!
   2. So that’s lesson number one from Leviticus 11 – All of creation is infected with sin but God’s salvation plan includes creation! **Lesson number two is that as New Testament believers, we are not bound by this ‘holy menu**.’ We may eat *any* animal or fish or bird or insect.
      1. In **Mark 7**, in response to a rebuke from the Pharisees about Jesus’ disciples not washing their hands before eating, Jesus said, “*Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?*” And then Mark adds this note: “*(Thus He declared all foods clean.)*” And this same point was made with Peter in our earlier reading from Acts 10. He saw the vision of the net with clean and unclean animals and was told to eat any of them. And when Peter replied that he could not anything unclean, the voice from heaven said, “*What God has made clean, do not call common*.” **1 Corinthians 10:25-26** alsosays, “*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."”*
      2. So this ‘holy menu’ was for Israel and Old Testament times. It served its purpose by marking Israel off as God’s chosen nation. But now that Christ has come and God is at work in a saving way in every nation, this ‘holy menu’ no longer applies for us.
   3. But lesson number three, which is our last lesson, is that **holiness is still necessary**. **Leviticus 11:45** says, “*Be holy, for I am holy*.” And we find those exact same words addressed to New Testament believers in **1 Peter 1:16**, “*Be holy, for I am holy*.” And then in **1 Peter 2** we read, “*But you are … a holy nation … Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that … they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*.”
      1. So we don’t abstain from the flesh of unclean animals but from the passions of the flesh. We are not different from unbelievers because of what we do eat or do not eat, but because we avoid any kind of sexual impurity and drunkenness and losing our temper. We avoid paying back evil for evil, and we are ready to suffer for doing good. We strive to submit to authority, rather than to rebel. We strive to live self-controlled and sober lives. And these are all things that Paul mentions in 1 Peter.
      2. And we do all of this, so that, as people see that we live different to them, they will ask us why. And then we can tell them that Jesus has saved us from our sins, and so we are trying to live the life that He calls us to live, because it is the best life! And we can tell them that one day Jesus will return and make a new heavens and new earth where there is no more chaos and confusion and contamination and death. And we can tell them that they can enjoy this new creation if they too will repent of their sins and believe in Jesus.

And this, congregation, is the gospel of Leviticus 11. Amen.