

**Pandemic Theology 2.0 - A Close Contact**  
**Leviticus 11:1-4,31-35, 12:1-6, 13:1-8,45-46**

Brothers and sisters, these scripture passages that we read this morning would normally seem irrelevant, if not confusing and bizarre to us – and indeed the first few probably still are. However, given our current pandemic circumstances, the last two readings from chapter 13 probably resonated with us a bit more.

While the readings from chapters 11 and 12 are concerned with food and childbirth, chapter 13 has a medical angle to it, dealing with skin diseases – specifically a defiling skin disease – which in the older versions of scripture was translated as leprosy.

And we can relate to this medical angle right now, and I'm sure as we read it, the words "*isolate for seven days*" and "*isolate for another seven days*" kind of jumped out at us... and we're like 'ya – isolating, we know all about that right now!'

And we can certainly relate to how inconclusive symptoms may present themselves and thus precautionary isolation is needed. It's been over a year now where having a headache, a sore throat, aches and pains, or just generally feeling unwell, gets us exhorted to stay at home and self-isolate just in case these symptoms turned into something more serious.

So, we can relate to the situation in Leviticus 13.

If the symptoms of the skin condition in question began to develop into leprosy, then the afflicted person would not have exposed any other people to this disease and it would help to prevent it from spreading to others – or the very least it would limit the spread.

And we can also understand why anyone unfortunate enough to be afflicted with leprosy, or a defiling skin disease, would have to live outside the camp away from the rest of the people, and walk about with a disheveled appearance, and wear a mask over their mouth and nose, and warn people to keep their distance by shouting unclean, unclean.

Because we have heard the reports about those who were severely ill with Covid-19 having to stay isolated in the hospital in the ICU, unable to have family or friends visit them – the nurses and doctors caring for them having to wear inhuman amounts of PPE, and how in some of the more tragic situations these people have passed away – isolated and alone, because it was determined that the risk of infection through proximity was simply too high to let them stay around other people.

And so, our pandemic circumstances have enabled us to better relate to something in scripture that would ordinarily seem irrelevant and unrelated to us.

But I'm going to throw you a bit of a curve-ball right now. That medical angle which we're resonating with in Leviticus 13... is not what this chapter is actually concerned about.

Now I know a lot of people may think so, and a surface reading of the text might seem to indicate that, but without getting into a lot of technical details, let me just say that a medical angle being the primary focus for this chapter is

undermined by its connection to chapters 11, 12, and 14 and 15 where other aspects of daily life are also described as either clean or unclean.

And if you read through chapter 13 you will notice that the diagnosis given to the various skin conditions or diseases is not infectious or non-infectious... its clean or unclean, and the concern is not whether it is contagious or deforming or incurable or terminal, its whether the skin disease is defiling to them.

So, the diagnostic categories in this passage of scripture are clean and unclean, and this means Leviticus 13, as well as chapters 11,12, 14 and 15 are concerned with something of a religious and spiritual nature as opposed to certain characteristics or concerns regarding the animals, items or experiences described in these chapters.

Which naturally leads us to ask the question – if they are actually dealing with religious, spiritual, non-physical matters - why are they referencing very physical things?

Quite simply brothers and sisters its because we can't actually see the spiritual and religious side of reality, so if we are to become aware of it, to understand it and respect it - then we must learn about it through something we can see, and that is what ritual and ceremony are designed for.

In rituals and ceremonies, spiritual realities are physically expressed, manifested for us to see and understand and comprehend... and participate in so that we may develop an awareness of this unseen part of reality in which we live and how we ought to respond to it.

And in the book of Leviticus, God was laying out all the details for the rituals and ceremonies that would guide and direct how Israel was supposed to worship Him - and thus learn to how respond correctly because they have the right understanding of the spiritual reality about God and about themselves.

And so, what we've read from Leviticus chapters 11,12 and 13 this morning, describes how being clean or unclean

determines whether or not you are able to participate in these worship ceremonies and rituals – and the NIV translators have very kindly clarified and emphasized this connection for us by attaching the term “ceremonially” to the word “unclean” in various places throughout these chapters, specifically in 11:4, 12:2,7 and 13:3 which we read this morning.

And so as we take a closer look at this whole concept of being unclean or clean that is referred to in these chapters, – keep in mind that it is about ceremonial cleanliness or ritual purity, especially as it relates to being able to go into the presence of God to participate in worship.

Now again, that is something that we would normally struggle to relate to – but in our present pandemic circumstances we now must check ourselves for any symptoms and answer a list of questions before we can physically go to help lead or attend worship.

You know how this goes right – are you experiencing any symptoms right now such as a sore throat, dry cough, or

fever? No, ok good. Have you recently returned from travelling outside Canada? No, ok that's good. Have you recently been a close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19? Ummm – well define close contact...

Well that is being within 6' of someone for more than 15 minutes within a three day period prior to their testing positive for Covid-19. Ah ok – no, you're in the clear. All good – you can go to worship this morning and be in God's presence.

And if we find this restrictive – consider what you would have to take into account before you went off to the Tabernacle or the Temple while living under the laws of the Mosaic Covenant.

The list of questions you would have to ask yourself is just a wee bit longer.

We'll work backwards from Leviticus 15 which would have the guys asking themselves - Do I have any sort of unusual

discharge coming from my body? Did I have any reproductive emissions occur while I was sleeping? And the women would have to take into account if they were experiencing their monthly period.

Then moving back to Leviticus 14, you would have to check if had noticed any mold or mildew on the walls of your home or tent or on any of your clothes? If you did there was some additional questions to determine whether or not this mold or mildew had made you unclean.

Then as we read from Leviticus 13, you would need to check yourself over to make sure that you didn't have any rashes or skin conditions that could be concerning – if you did you needed to follow the protocols and wait to see if it developed into a skin disease that made you unclean.

And then from Leviticus 12, if you were a woman and you had recently given birth to a child – you would be asking yourself – has it been thirty-three days yet since my son was born? Or sixty-six days since my daughter was born?

And Leviticus 11 would have you asking if you had eaten any animal meat that was unclean, either because it was an unclean animal, or because it was a clean animal that had died before it was butchered.

You would also have to double check to make sure that you hadn't even touched an unclean animal or a dead animal, or if you had found a dead rat in your barn for example – that you had dealt with whatever the dead rat had been touching appropriately so the item or object wouldn't make you unclean since you had touched it or handled it.

And of course, Yahweh forbid, if you had to deal with a dead human body – then as it says in Numbers 19:11 you would also be unclean.

So – if your answers for all these questions put you in the clear, and this is by no means a complete list of questions – but if you were clear, then you were ready to ask the next big question - which was; have I been a close contact to anyone else who has answered yes to any of these questions.

You see brothers and sisters, in many cases if you had become ceremonially unclean – and you touched another person and had contact with them, or if you touched an object and then another person touched it, they would become ceremonially unclean as well.

So that also meant if you determined you were unclean, you had a responsibility to let your fellow Israelites know if you had touched them or allowed them to touch something of yours and had made them unclean - so that they could respond appropriately and they wouldn't make anyone else unclean either.

We know how this works right?

Ordinarily this isn't something that we would really relate to – but with having to determine if you were a close contact of someone who has tested positive, and then getting tested yourself... and if you test positive having to identify and notify all the people that you were in close contact with... well we have a much better sense of what it was like to determine if

you were ceremonially clean or unclean before you decided to go off to worship at the Tabernacle or the Temple and be in God's holy presence.

This is literally why King David asks the question in Psalm 24:3 *"Who may stand in Yahweh's holy place?"* and why he supplies the answer *"The one who has clean hands and a pure heart!"*

Now having a full five chapters in Leviticus, along with a few other verses sprinkled throughout the Law of Moses, that identify what was clean and unclean – makes it easy to think that there was something very significantly wrong with being unclean and to look for some sort of explanation as to why certain things had the capacity to make you unclean.

For example, I've heard people try to explain that pigs are ceremonially unclean because they are dirty unsanitary animals and their meat is not really safe or healthy to eat. Despite the fact that any pig farmer would tell you this is nonsense.

And I know that feminists take offense at how women's reproductive capacities are identified as ceremonially unclean in Leviticus because they assume it insinuates that there is something shameful or inferior about these female capacities – that must be why they are unclean.

But brothers and sisters, being unclean is not a problem in an of itself – just like being a close contact with someone is not a moral issue.

If you were unclean, it simply meant that you had to either wait for a period of time – until the evening came, or for a number of days, or you had to wash something or take a bath and, in some cases, once those rituals had been performed then you needed to present yourself to the priest and offer an additional purification sacrifice, like a lamb, a pigeon or a dove.

It's important to note that being ceremonially unclean or clean was not something you were held morally culpable for.

And I think we can understand that now a bit better with how no one deems us irresponsible or morally culpable if we end up having been a close contact of someone who has tested positive. It just means that we have to self-isolate for a period of time before we are in the clear again.

Now I know that this raises the question – why in the world then does God give Israel all this instruction about clean and unclean if there was no moral or sinful aspect to it?

Brothers and sisters the easiest answer to that is that these were object lessons that helped to teach Israel about the massive gap that exists between what it means to be human and what it means to be divine. Just like Paul says in Galatians 3:24 “the Law – which includes all of this material about clean and unclean – is a tutor” Its purpose was to instruct and teach.

Now we typically think teaching is about instruction of what is right and wrong, and that’s certainly true – but there’s more that needs to be learned than that.

Yahweh needed to teach His people that due to the difference between His divine, eternal nature as Creator of all things and their mortal and corrupted human nature, they could not be in His presence without some sort of protection.

While it is an amazing experience to be in the presence of the Almighty God, the very nature of God’s divinity will undo us as mortal corrupted human beings – its like getting too close to the sun, it will destroy us – we won’t survive an encounter with the raw presence of the Living God.

We need to be made aware there is this aspect of what it means to be Divine that is so far beyond what it means to be human that the concentrated presence of His glory would consume us.

So – one does not simply... waltz into the place where God’s presence is manifesting to worship Him, and the laws and regulations about being ceremonially clean or unclean serve to teach Israel about this.

So, while there was no moral culpability in being unclean – it was a sin to enter God’s presence in such a state. That reflected an ignorance, or worse yet – an arrogance about the reality that exists between the Divine and human, and who we are in comparison to the Divine. There was no worship song for Israel that said “come - just as you are to worship.”

In fact, there’s a sad story about that in Leviticus 10. For whatever reason, two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu decide they were going to take fire from the altar, add some incense to it and offer it in worship before Yawheh. However, God had not commanded them to do as His priests and as they offered this un-authorized fire to God it says *“fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke, saying: ‘By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy”* (Lev 10:2-3)

I don’t think it’s coincidental these events in chapter 10 are followed by five chapters of teachings about clean and unclean. It was vitally important that Israel learned to prepare

themselves to enter into the presence of God through following the prescribed directions and rituals to ensure they were clean, and if they did so God’s presence would not consume them.

So, understanding the purpose of these regulations allows us to have a better sense of why God picked some of the physical examples as clean or unclean.

In specifying which animals are clean and unclean, God exercises His prerogative as the Creator in telling His Humans what they can or can’t eat, just as He did with Adam and Eve. There doesn’t need to be any other reason for it, except for the fact that God said – and following His guidelines then show that His people recognized that He is God and has the authority to make such decisions for them. We are made in God’s image – we are God’s stewards and representatives in the creation - but we are nowhere near being God ourselves.

The rest of the physical examples relating to clean and unclean all function as good examples of how human nature



has been corrupted and how we are not the source of life, in comparison to the divine.

As amazing as human reproduction is, because of the fall into sin and the resulting curse upon creation – human reproduction produces beings who are biologically alive but spiritually dead. And skin diseases and mold and mildew are good examples of how both our physical bodies and the physical creation are corrupted and perishable compared to the eternal and incorruptible nature of the divine.

Do you see how these are being used to contrast human against divine and teach about the difference, and even more importantly – help Israel internalize this so they realize this is who they are before the living God.

So, I encourage you brothers and sisters – as we continue to determine if we are in the clear to go somewhere in person, or whenever we have to isolate because of our symptoms or because we've been a close contact – remember how this helps us to better relate to being clean or unclean in Leviticus

and what God was teaching us about approaching Him and coming into His presence through this.

Because it will make us much more grateful and appreciative for Jesus Christ and how Jesus functions as our Great High Priest who functions as the means by which we may enter into the presence of the Living God without worrying whether we are clean or unclean – because Jesus is clean on our behalf! You see brothers and sisters, when the Word became flesh at the incarnation and Jesus was born - God did something that closed the gap and the difference between the Divine and human nature.

When Jesus took on our humanity, he not only broke the power of sin over it, and reversed the corrupting influence of the curse, He was raised to glory in it and ascended into God's presence in it! Jesus Christ is the first fruits, the prototype of human nature as it has been made fit to stand in the presence of God and withstand the full glory of God seated on His heavenly throne, without being consumed!

And we are given access to this new humanity, we are included IN Jesus' glorified human nature, we are considered to be clean and fit to be in the presence of the Living God because the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us, and has filled us, and is our connection to Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we often think that its only our individual sins which stand in the way of us "having a relationship with God" but the gap between human and divine is so much more than that.

Our very nature as mortal humans, outside of Jesus Christ, is simply not fit to be in God's presence, it can't endure it, and we impoverish our own gratitude and love for Jesus and what He has accomplished for us by neglecting to learn what it means to be clean or unclean.

Now maybe you're thinking – well I'm certainly grateful for Jesus, it would be a real burden having to go through the hassle of figuring out if I was clean or unclean just to be able to go to worship! So glad Jesus saved me from the rules!

I pray you're not thinking that – because then you haven't grasped the spiritual reality that God intends these scriptures to teach us about who we are and who He really is...

and you won't appreciate how He has closed the gap between divine and human in Jesus Christ, and what that means we will be transformed into when we are glorified.

Brothers and sisters, if we ever start to feel like worship is getting stale or boring or we're looking for something more out of it...

Then go back to Leviticus and read it, so that you will be reminded of how God's divine nature would consume us if we casually walked into His presence without making certain that we were clean – aware of how mortal, corruptible, temporary, dependent and created we are in contrast to the divine.

May the Holy Spirit work through what we have heard this morning brothers and sisters, to give us a deeper appreciation of God's all-surpassing greatness... His majesty... His glory

that is beautiful beyond created description or comparison,  
His existence that confounds our comprehension as He  
ALWAYS was, is and will ALWAYS be... He is THE Creator who  
sustains the fabric of reality so that we might exist to give Him  
glory and honor and praise

Brothers and sisters when you worship God do you realize  
who you are worshipping and just how amazing it is?  
I pray this morning that we will have a renewed appreciation  
that we are able to come into His presence – and not be  
consumed. That we are worshipping an awesome God.

So - all thanks and praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ – through  
whom we may worship the living God, and by whom we are  
raised from the dead and brought into glory, and our human  
nature is glorified and made fit – so that we may be a close  
contact of the divine, living in God's presence for eternity.

Amen.