

Leviticus 14

A lovely young lady (who might or might not have been blonde) read an article in a beauty magazine which said that if you take a bath in milk, it makes your skin look really beautiful. So that night she left a note for the milkman that said, "Please leave me 115 quarts of milk." The next morning milkman read the note and thought he better make sure this amount was what she really wanted. So he rang the doorbell and when she answered, he asked her if he was reading this note right. She replied, "Yes I read that it's good to bathe in milk." The milkman then asked her, "Do you want it pasteurized?" She answered, "Oh no, just past my neck would be fine!"

Well, Moses didn't have much to say about taking a milk bath, but in Leviticus Chapter 14, he does give instructions regarding the cleansing of lepers:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **2** "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, **3** and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, **4** then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. **5** The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. **6** As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. **7** He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field. **8** The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. **9** It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean.

Leprosy was a pretty nasty disease. Not just because it caused so much disfigurement (fingers, toes, noses, and other body parts falling off) but because it was so contagious!

As we saw last week, all of Chapter 13 was devoted to how the priests diagnosed leprosy and declared it unclean. And we saw in verse 45 last week that "As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'"

As if it wasn't humiliating enough to have your nose fall off, you also had to announce it to the world so that everyone could steer clear of you, since they were all afraid of the disease spreading to them.

In this chapter, Moses is giving instructions as to what the process would like be if someone actually thought their leprosy had been cured, which wasn't very often, because there WAS no known cure for leprosy at that time.

But we know of at least one time when this procedure was used. In Luke 5:12-14 Jesus heals a leper, and then instructs the healed man to follow the specific part of the Law of Moses that we are reading about here in Leviticus 14: "While He was in one of the cities, behold, *there was* a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." **13** And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. **14** And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

What was the "testimony to them"? Why would this impress the priests? It would be a testimony to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah because he could heal leprosy!

Healing of leprosy was generally considered to be a miracle from God. In 2nd Kings Chapter 5, the Syrian general Naaman goes to Elisha the prophet to be healed from leprosy because he has been told that the God of Israel has the power to cure his disease.

We see in verse 10 that:

Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan (river) seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will* be clean."

At first Naaman is ticked off. He doesn't understand why he has to do such a thing. He says, "We have nice rivers back in Syria. Why do I have to bathe in this Hebrew river?" But when he finally obeys God's instructions we see in verse 14:

So he went down and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

The first part of being made clean was a ceremony of washing, cleansing, and shaving. This was probably to make sure there was no disease left on the person's body.

The next step was to make an offering to God, which consisted of two lambs and a grain offering, which is covered in verses 10-20. Then verses 21-32 it repeats the same instructions, except this is for a poor person who has to use a pigeon instead of a lamb.

(so we aren't going to read through all of that unless you want to do it at home on your own time!)

The remainder of the chapter concerns what to do if a HOUSE has leprosy! I didn't even know that a house COULD have leprosy until I read this chapter:

33 The Lord further spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying:

34 "When you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a mark of leprosy on a house in the land of your possession, **35** then the one who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, '*Something* like a mark of leprosy has become visible to me in the house.' **36** The priest shall then command that they empty the house before the priest goes in to look at the mark, so that everything in the house need not become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to look at the house. **37** So he shall look at the mark, and if the mark on the walls of the house has greenish or reddish depressions and appears deeper than the surface, **38** then the priest shall come out of the house, to the doorway, and quarantine the house for seven days. **39** The priest shall return on the seventh day and make an inspection. If the mark has indeed spread in the walls of the house, **40** then the priest shall order them to tear out the stones with the mark in them and throw them away at an unclean place outside the city. **41** He shall have the house scraped all around inside, and they shall dump the plaster that they scrape off at an unclean place outside the city. **42** Then they shall take other stones and replace *those* stones, and he shall take other plaster and replaster the house.

Some commentaries seem to think that the disease affecting the houses was something more like mildew than leprosy, but either way, God was trying to protect His people from sickness and teach them to be pure and holy, both with their bodies and with their environments.

As you can see from the verses we just looked at, if the house could be cleansed up and replastered, then the people could go back to living there. But this situation was considered serious enough that verses 44 and 45 say:

44 then the priest shall come in and make an inspection. If he sees that the mark has indeed spread in the house, it is a malignant mark in the house; it is unclean. **45** He shall therefore tear down the house, its stones, and its timbers, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall take *them* outside the city to an unclean place.

Tear down the house – every bit of it – and drag the stones and timbers out of town! Does that sound like an extreme solution to you? Does it make you think that maybe God was trying to send a message about living clean lives?

Let me ask you this – how much of your old unclean way of living does God want you to keep as a part of your new Life in Christ? (Answer – NONE! Tear it all down! Throw it all out!)

Verses 48-53 describes the cleansing process for the houses, which is basically identical to the cleansing process for people, with running water, the scarlet thread, and the birds. Then verses 54-57 sum up the whole chapter this way:

54 This is the law for any mark of leprosy—even for a scale, **55** and for the leprous garment or house, **56** and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot— **57** to teach when they are unclean and when they are clean. This is the law of leprosy.

So what can we learn from this chapter on being cleansed from leprosy?

First, the Law of Moses had no power to heal. It could only identify whether the disease was present. The cleansing ceremonies and sacrifices conducted by the priests did not cure the disease. The diseased person only came to the priests after he had already been healed. The priests could only declare the person who had been healed ceremonially clean and able to rejoin the community.

The commentary says “Through these ceremonial cleansings, which took place in two stages a week apart, the diseased individual was restored to fellowship with God and with His people.”

It's still the same in our lives today. Keeping a set of rules or performing certain acts of contrition or service doesn't cleanse us from sin.

It doesn't matter how many Our Fathers or Hail Marys you pray. It doesn't matter how much money you put in the offering box. It doesn't matter how many Sundays you attend church. Praying, giving, and worshipping are all good things, but they don't fix our basic disease problem.

The only thing that can heal the disease of sin is the blood of Jesus. And the only way that we get our sins covered is through faith and repentance – that's it!

We don't necessarily come together to worship IN ORDER to get our sins forgiven – We come together to worship BECAUSE our sins are forgiven!

The second thing that I want you to notice from this chapter was that the cleansing was a 2-stage process: Stage one of the cleansing process took place outside the camp where the lepers were required to live. That was where a man washed himself and his clothes clean, and then shaved. Two birds were then utilized. The blood of one bird was used to purify the man. The death of that bird symbolized the death of the disease. The second bird was allowed to fly away free. That symbolized freedom from the symptoms of the disease.

In the second cleansing stage, the person was brought back into full relationship with God. The ceremony involved being touched with blood on the ear, the hand, and the foot and then being anointed with oil.

Let's consider how this applies to our lives today.

When we are first saved and cleansed, what things change right away?

It's our outside behavior that changes most noticeably at the beginning isn't it?

We change our habits. We don't go to places we used to go. We hang around with different people. We talk differently. These are important changes, and hopefully people will begin to notice what a difference Jesus is making in our lives.

But that's just the first stage – the outside stage.

When God moves us to stage two (and He definitely WILL) He starts to focus more on the inside, on a deeper relationship with Him.

Now these changes aren't necessarily as easy to see, but they are just as important as, probably even more important, than those external behaviors.

Now God is focusing on issues of the heart and attitudes of the mind. Now we are dealing with things like faith, trust, honesty, integrity, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and a desire to serve others.

Just like here in Leviticus 14, we are all in an ongoing two-stage process of being fully restored to the right relationship with God that He always wanted to have with us.

The process takes time, and it helps if we are giving our active and willing participation as God continues to bring this process towards completion.

And as we find ourselves moving along this path of cleansing and restoration, let us not forget to give thanks, give praise, and give glory to God for this miraculous work that He is doing in our lives.

Let us keep in mind this other story about lepers from

Luke 17:11-17

While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. **12** As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; **13** and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” **14** When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. **15** Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, **16** and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?”

Notice that the shouted to Jesus from a distance, because they weren't allowed to come near Him.

Notice also that Jesus sends them to the priests, just like Leviticus 14 demanded, even though they hadn't been fully healed yet!

They got their healing “as they were going” to show themselves to the priests.

Our healing is a PROCESS, it's a JOURNEY, and things are happening along the way!

But as we all know from this story, nine of the ten lepers who were healed just kept on going – just went on with life and went about their business!

Only one took the time to stop what he was doing and took the time to give thanks and glory to God.

As we recognize the ongoing changes that are happening in our lives day by day through the healing, cleansing power of Jesus, may we always remember to take the time to give Him glory, honor, and praise.