

Discharge and Redemption
Leviticus 15

Sermon by Rev. Nathan Eshelman
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Jairus, a ruler of the Jews, had a twelve year old daughter who was terribly sick and about to die. The Lord Jesus was called to come and lay hands on her to heal her that she may live. And the Lord does just that; he goes and heals her by laying his hand on her and saying in Aramaic, “Talitha cumi” which is the diminutive for, “Little girl, little girl get up.” And she lived.

When we hear this our minds are filled with compassion because there is just something so wrong about little children dying isn't there? We saw this on Friday with that horrendous shooting that occurred in Connecticut. And here Jesus extends his love and warmth to this little girl and gives her life.

But something also happens in Mark's account on the way to Jarius' home. Remember? Jesus gets off of the boat and it's very crowded. I imagine that he is thinking about this little girl, and the crowd is pressing around him, people bumping into him and people rubbing against him because of the crowd. Something happens in the crowd. Jesus perceives that power has gone out from him. Now, I can't explain exactly what that looks like, but there is something that Jesus understands happened. Jesus says, “Who touched me?” The disciples in amazement tell him that there's a huge crowd and that lots of people are touching him.

But this woman comes forward with what Mark calls a discharge of blood that had lasted twelve years. She touched him by faith, and at that very moment she was healed. Do we really understand the depths of what she was going through? Twelve years of symptoms, but twelve years of symptoms under the Levitical laws concerning discharge and blood?

Today we look at Leviticus 15 under the theme, “Discharge and Redemption.” I wanted to begin with the story of this woman in the Gospel account because it puts a face on the law. It puts flesh and blood to a chapter that is often scoffed at, misunderstood and mocked by the modern church. Today we will see redemption in the midst of this woman's issue of blood.

We begin with some explanation of the text describing the rituals. As we look at the text, what can we say is going on as far as the rituals are concerned? What can the text teach us as we look at it? The first important thing that we must understand is the structure of the text itself. If you were to outline Leviticus 15 you will see that it follows a pattern called a “chiasm.” Chiasm as a structure looks a lot like steps working their way up to a platform and then back down again. We see it in Leviticus 15 like this: The first step is what we could call male abnormal discharge, v.1-15. On the opposite side of the platform we see abnormal female discharge, v.25-30. The next step up is what we would call normal male discharge shown in verses 16-18, and on the opposite side of that is normal female menstruation in verses 19-24. So we have an abnormal step on both sides, and a normal step on both sides. And the platform or the center point of the text is verse

18, “If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until the evening.” The center platform of the text is normal sexual behavior between a husband and a wife.

You see this law is not specifically intended to oppress women, but it is an equal opportunity discriminator against both genders as we have seen. And the Lord has chosen to give us this text in a balanced way that affects both male and female members of the covenant community.

So we see that the main concern here as far what is causing the uncleanness is the discharge. This is true in the male as well as in the female. It is discharge from the sexual organs that causes this uncleanness. Now I want you to notice that there is no accusation of sin involved in the reasons why it is called unclean; this chapter has nothing to do with gonorrhea or any other sexually transmitted disease. Yet, there is still a ritual attached to the uncleanness.

In verses 6 and 10-12 there are certain washings that must follow the cessation of the discharge. Then there are seven days of uncleanness followed by a very simple sacrifice offered as a sin offering and a whole burnt offering. You may remember we talked about the sin offering before, and it is an offering that centers on the tabernacle and temple to keep them from being defiled.

We see in this text some of what the woman who touched the Lord Jesus experienced in her twelve years of uncleanness. This meant that she would not have been able to sleep in the same bed as her husband, if she were married, and she would have furniture set apart in the home just for her. More troubling she was forbidden to enter into God’s public worship because of her uncleanness. Her abnormal discharges prevented her living a normal life. This undoubtedly consumed her as she prayed and sang and worshiped the Lord in loneliness.

What was the rationale behind this law? First, this law is neither suspicious of normal marital sexual behavior, nor does the law assume sin to be involved in godly marital intimacy. What is God teaching his ancient church in this law as they meditate on it and look ahead for the one who would fulfill this law? I believe that there are two main theological truths that the Lord is teaching his people through this law; two intimately connected theological truths. Keep in mind that God is teaching his people essential theological truths and not essential medical truths.

The first aspect of the rationale is seen in the center of this chiasmic structure. Remember the central verse in this passage is verse 18, and when we read that verse there should be some shock in our minds. Normal marital intimacy causes ceremonial uncleanness, but why is this? The ancient people of God were to wash themselves and to be unclean until the evening following marital intimacy because God wanted them to reflect on the fact that life is out of order. The way that God designed man and woman and creation and procreation has been turned upside down because of the fall. Man continues to be held responsible for that fall.

Do you remember the curse given to Eve? Even in childbearing there would be pain. Here we see that the pain of child bearing, which is an aspect of marital intimacy, goes beyond physical pain.

There is ceremonial isolation that occurred under the law as a way for the covenant community to consider just how far the effects of sin have been on humanity.

How much has been effected by sin? The Roman Catholic scholars said that all was affected within man excepting his rational mind. Modern evangelicals often say that man's heart is fallen, but the will of man was freed at the death of Jesus Christ. Both views are in error. The teaching of the Word of God is that every aspect of your life has been affected by the fall. That includes the mind, heart, will, and reproduction. All of creation is in thorns and weeds, and all aspects of life have been affected. This law in Leviticus points us to the truth that the effects of the fall are far reaching including even something as good, natural and commanded as marital intimacy. We might understand why abnormal discharge would be problematic, but menstruation and marital intimacy? Even these things bring uncleanness.

You see the command given to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth with life. This law points us back to that original command, but the disobedience of our first father Adam caused that law to be broken. We inherit our sin nature and brokenness from Adam. Children die in school shootings because of that brokenness of sin. Babies die in infancy because of the brokenness of sin. Miscarriages occur because of the brokenness of sin. Twelve year old daughters die in the homes of rulers like Jarius because of the brokenness of sin.

Life is out of order.

The rationale goes beyond us. We do not serve a distant God who looks upon humanity and merely declares them unclean. At the time of the giving of this law, God was pleased to dwell in the tabernacle in the sight of his people. However, this law anticipates the day in which the redeemer would come and dwell in the very midst of his people. Look at verse 31 to see the other side of this rationale. "Thus you will keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." The rationale cuts right to the heart of the issue: God is holy and a holy God cannot dwell in his midst of an unholy people. God provided outward ways to be ceremonially clean. "Cover yourself with this type. Cover yourself with this shadow. Cover yourself with this ceremonial law before you approach me." God is in his holy temple and man must all be silenced. Natural man is unclean, and his sinfulness, uncleanness and defilement must be covered for God to dwell in the midst of the covenant people.

Our natural response is, "We are unclean therefore we must . . ." But, that is completely wrong. God is not teaching us that "we must" anything in this text; God is teaching us that "we can't." God is a holy God and in his holiness he requires holiness. Unholiness cannot dwell in the midst of holiness. It is impossible. God's holiness would consume us and we would be dead. We would be gone. The purpose of this law and these ceremonies is not that we can "do" it is because we "can't." Let that sink in. The law as a teacher and as a guide is a terror to us. The ceremonial law is intended to stop us in our tracks and tell us that there is nothing that we can do.

The law is a school master to teach the children of Israel that they can't do a thing to be made right with God. Friends, how many adult Jewish believers do you think were unclean in their

lifetime? Well for sure all of the women who had normal periods were unclean, and they were unclean for about half of their adult life. Think about that? How about the men? All of the married men would have been unclean at some point. Every time they were intimate with their wife. Even all of the single men would have been unclean at some point.

Every person in the whole covenant community would have been unclean at some point in life and many frequently unclean. They would have uncleanness From the food they ate, from the giving of birth, from eczema and psoriasis and red patchy baldness. Uncleanness would come from nocturnal emissions, menstruation and being intimate with your spouse. Unclean. Unclean. Unclean. The law is a terror and no man can keep it all of it. It is meant to drive the ancient hearers to their knees as they look for another way. All of Israel is unclean, and all of Israel is guilty. All of Israel is in need of something other than laws which show them their uncleanness. What is it that they need? Friends, what they need is seen in the provision of these two doves, this sin offering and whole burnt offering. What they need is the redeemer.

Why did we so meticulously go through the offerings at the beginning of Leviticus? Perhaps some of you tired of hearing about cutting animals and draining blood and burning flesh? But, we worked our way through them carefully because the Lord has given them as images of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work. The people were to wrestle with the theology of grace and hope and redemption as the priests and rabbis explained the meaning of the sacrifices and pointed them ever so graciously to look ahead to the mediator that was to come. To look ahead to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see that these offerings are the poorest of offerings allowed under the law. When one was unclean from abnormal or normal discharge they came before the priest and offered both a sin offering and a whole burnt offering. Remember, the sin offering was to protect the tabernacle and the temple from being defiled. This is connected to verse 31 which says that God's holiness must be kept in mind as he dwells among men. And then the most basic of burnt offerings was connected to verse 18 showing that all of creation is out of order. The burnt offering is connected to the fall of man and the need for redemption.

The redeemer is illustrated in both aspects of the rationale behind the ritual, the holiness of God and sinfulness of man. This is also evident in the Mark 5 text where the Lord Jesus healed a woman of her discharge of blood that she suffered with for twelve years. She reached out by faith and was made whole. She believed. And friends, we need to understand that what happened in Mark 5 is that the Lord Jesus fulfilled this law in Leviticus. The Lord Jesus took on the uncleanness of this woman and he placed it on himself as the mediator of the new covenant. I want you to see that what Mark describes as "power had gone out from him" refers to an exchange taking place between Christ and the woman. That woman's uncleanness was exchanged for the cleanness of the Lord Jesus. She was healed at that instance and made whole because of belief. Alien righteousness, meaning righteousness that was not her own, now covered her and Jesus took on her iniquity. The righteousness of Christ is imputed on those who believe while the uncleanness and sin is imputed upon him.

How amazing is that? We get this tiny glimpse into what it looked like for Jesus to bear the iniquity of his people. And we must understand that uncleanness was something that he would bear as the redeemer. All of his life was a life of suffering and redemption as he took on the sins of his people.

So as we look at this text we cannot help but observe that all teens and adults in this room would be unclean occasionally because of this law. And that's the point, all of us fall short. All of us. And redemption is not found in the question "What can I do?" The people would "do" and most likely within a month they would have to "do again." The law is a terror if you are trying to be made right with God through it. It will kill you. You cannot merely be a good person to be righteous before God. This law teaches us just how deeply that uncleanness goes! Jesus is gracious and faithful. He takes the burden of the law upon himself and he carries that to the cross so that men and women boys and girls can stand before God and say that they are righteous in Christ and not righteous in themselves. The Lord's people have righteousness because of Jesus and the righteousness that he imputed onto our account.

This text is the tyranny of the law at its finest. Let it drive you to the one who offers grace and forgiveness apart from the works of the law. Will you reach out and touch the Lord as this woman with the discharge of blood touched? Will you hear from the Lord, "Go in peace daughter. Go in peace son, your faith has made you well, and be healed of your disease."

Bring the tyranny of the law to the cross where grace and mercy meet.

Amen