

The Journey Home

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 May 2026

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] I heard him before I saw him. The priest was coming. I was standing far outside the camp as I always did. Alone, covered up, watching the smoke from the fire that I wasn't allowed near.

! You see, people don't often come out here. No one comes out here. I've not seen my own family in years. Years that my condition had defined me unclean. But today, the priest came and did something very unexpected.

Instead of telling me to go further away, he started coming towards me. Leviticus 14 tells us the story of a leper in ancient Israel being restored back to his community.

But beneath this story lies another story. Our story. What we're reading here in Leviticus is not just ancient history. But there is, as we've already seen in this book, deep symbolism woven into these strange Israelite rituals, which God gave to the Israelites to do and has preserved for thousands of years to teach us something.

This that we're reading here is not just an ancient ritual that only pertains to them.

[1 : 5 1] And it's not just about a skin disease. But it's about something deeper. Because what we're going to read here is actually the story about how sinners in every generation who have read about this cleansing process, how sinners can be cleansed from a much deeper disease that we all have.

And as we read this through that lens, we start to see how much God has to say to us through this chapter. And so what we're going to do this morning is we're going to actually walk through the process with this leper.

We're going to walk with him through each stage of the process that he's got to go through to enter back into the community of Israel. And we're going to discover how every detail of it, strange as they may seem, actually teaches us something vital about our journey back to life.

And so there are four distinct stages in his cleansing process. The first is the state that he starts in outside the camp being unclean.

The first stage is his uncleanness. So the first thing we've got to understand is leper. When we read about a leper in the Bible, it's quite a broad term.

[3 : 1 1] It doesn't just refer to the disease that we call leprosy today, but it really refers to any chronic skin disease. And if you had a chronic skin disease in the ancient world, especially ancient Israel, there were some serious implications for your life.

Let me just read from the previous chapter. Chapter 13 from verse 45 says this. That's the instructions for someone with a chronic skin disease.

They must tear their clothes and let their hair be unkempt. A lot of people do that voluntarily today. But that wouldn't have been something you do normally.

So effectively it was a signal that to them and to the people in the camp that they were living essentially as dead people. They were visibly consumed by corruption and the corruption of the fall because this disease, just like any other diseases, was a result of the fall, which is our fall away from relationship with God because of sin, the state that we're all in by nature.

And this was an example of how that fall had visibly consumed someone, visibly touched someone. And so they were effectively cut off from life to be living as dead people or even looking like sort of semi-corpse, like zombies.

[5 : 0 0] That's the image you would have got from a leper. You would have seen them far away and they would have been walking around covered up. Like you see on zombie movies because it was to be a symbol, a visible sign that they were living now in a kind of a nether world outside of where the community was not technically dead, but also not really alive.

Now why? Why did they have to live like that in ancient Israel? Well, first of all, a practical reason to limit contagion.

It was very important in that community that there was quarantine zones. And so just like very, very contagious diseases today, people go into quarantine and this was one form of that.

And so, like with many laws in Leviticus, it had a very practical reason. But also like with all laws in Leviticus, it deals with a deeper result of the fall that is invisible.

Because God often does that. He often uses things that we can see to teach us about things that we can't. Just like we remembered in communion earlier, He uses bread and wine, real things that are in our world, to teach us about spiritual realities we can't see.

[6 : 21] Well, God uses the skin disease of an ancient Israelite the same way, to teach us something that we can't see. You see, skin disease in Israel, in the Bible, is one of the most vivid pictures you can find to describe the reality of our sin and what it does to us.

And skin disease and sin are often connected in the Old Testament because of their similarities.

You see, like skin disease, sin consumes us in a very real way.

Sin consumes us. It affects all the areas of our life and we can't ignore it. We try to, but it's always there. And also, like ancient skin diseases, sin separates us from God and the life that He made us to enjoy.

And that is why the Bible describes sinners as the living dead. It does. It describes sinners as dead people, but who are living as well.

Kind of like zombies. You know, we live. We have jobs. We have children. We go about our day.

But we're actually all dying.

[7 : 44] Dead. That's how the Bible describes sinners. We're dead. Not only because we're cut off from the life that God intended for us to live now.

We can't live that life. We can't live in the world that God intends us to live in the life that God made us for because of the sin inside us. So we're cut off from life in that way. We're dead in that way, but we're also by nature dead because we're under a death sentence by nature.

Romans 6.23 says, The wages of sin is death. So sin is the reason we die. We don't die because it's the natural circle of life. We know.

Anybody who's attended a funeral knows this is not meant to be. Of course it's not meant to be.

God didn't make us to die. He made us to live. But sin is the thing that terminates.

That terminates life. That gives us an eternal death sentence. And that is why in the Bible, those who are sinners, those separated from God, are described already as dead people.

[8 : 48] And yet, Leviticus 14 shows us that despite this leper being declared dead and cut off from life, chapter 14 is actually really good news because it describes the way that God has made for him to come back.

And the first step to him coming back from the dead back to life is God sending someone to him.

Have a look at Leviticus 14 verse 3. The priest is to go outside the camp and examine them.

So let's just pause there. This is quite a profound thing for the priest whose job it was to stay in the tabernacle, the holy place.

Remember in Leviticus you've got those three categories, holy, clean and unclean. And the unclean can never be in contact with the holy. You've got the clean as the buffer zone. If you don't know, then listen to our sermons that we've done so far.

[10 : 00] But we've got to understand those zones to understand Leviticus. And what's happening here is that the priest who operates in the zone of the holy actually goes through the clean and enters outside, goes right outside the camp to approach this leper.

So God, when God healed someone, and of course their healing happens only because God allows it. When God heals someone, then he sends his priest out to where they are to make them whole again, to begin the process of bringing them home.

The priest goes outside of the tabernacle, outside of the camp, and into the netherworld of this leper to bring him out of it.

And I think right there is the first way that this ritual points us actually to Jesus Christ. And what he was going to come and do for all of us.

You see, all of these things in the Old Testament, Jesus told us, point us somewhere to him. And you know how this first stage of this cleansing process of the leper points us to Jesus? It tells us that he was going to come, do exactly the same thing.

[11 : 19] Leave the glory of heaven that the tabernacle represented, and become a man, become one of us, take on flesh, and enter into our brokenness, enter into our netherworld of sin and death

that we live in, so he can begin the process of bringing us home to God.

And that is the first stage, the first step that we see. But then, the second stage that this leper has to now go through is the stage of cleansing.

Look at from verse 4. It says this, Then the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedarwood, scarlet yarn and hyssop, be brought for the person to be cleansed.

Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it together with the cedarwood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water.

Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the defiling disease and then pronounce them clean. After that, he is to release the live bird in the open fields.

[12:30] Now I know, this is normally a kind of passage you skip over, right? What's this got to do with us? What's this possibly got to say to us?

And it seems pretty bizarre, all the things that the priest does. But you know what? For the leper, in that situation, it would have meant a profound amount to him to see what the priest is doing.

Because, you see, back then they understood the symbolism of these things. We don't. And so we think this has nothing to say to us. But we've just got to dig a bit deeper and look at the symbolism. And it then becomes as meaningful for us as it was for the leper then.

And there's three particular things that happen that have deep symbolism. Firstly, the use of hyssop. What is hyssop? Sounds like a cough medicine.

Okay, but it's not. It's a plant that was prolific in Egypt. And the last time before now that we read about hyssop was actually in the Exodus.

[13:35] When God commanded, before the angel of death was going to pass over, God was rescuing his people from Egypt and the plagues were coming in Egypt. He commanded them to take specifically hyssop and to slaughter a lamb and to paint its blood over the door frames of their house.

Remember that? So that God's judgment would not fall on them. The blood would protect them.

That lamb was kind of their substitute. And so the deliberate mention of hyssop here is to link right back to the Exodus and when God rescued his people out of Egypt.

The second symbolism is the blood mixed with water. Probably also to remind the leper of God's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt through blood of the lamb that was painted on the door and through water of the Red Sea that they had to pass through.

And then the third symbol was the bird that was released. But interestingly, the priest had to dip it in the blood and water before releasing it. So through blood and water, this bird was freed to remind them of God freeing the Israelites through blood and water from their slavery in Egypt.

So all of these symbols were actually going back to the Exodus as if this leper who's now coming back in is reliving Israel's origin story of being rescued out of Egypt.

[15:03] He's being re-rescued. It's like because he's come from death and he's got to come back into Israel, he's got to relive their whole story from the beginning. That's what's going on here.

Because this leper is himself being re-rescued out of the place of death and captivity that he was in outside.

But this doesn't only symbolize what happens to him here. It also symbolizes what happens to every sinner if they're going to have life, if they're going to know God, if they're going to be in a real relationship with God and enter into new life.

The first thing that needs to happen for every sinner is they first need to be freed of the slavery they are in. That's the whole deep symbolic meaning of Israel's story is before they can go and enter the land and have life, they need to be rescued from the land they're in and so do we.

So did this leper and so do we. We need to be first rescued from slavery, each one of us, if we're going to have life. Because that's what sin is.

That's how it's described in the Bible. Slavery. Sin is slavery. What is slavery? It's when you're forced to do something that you don't choose to do.

[16:25] Well, that's exactly what sin does to us, right? We know it. You might even go, well, I'm not a sinner. But you do things that you don't want to do. You say things and think things you don't want to.

That's what sin is. It makes us do things that we don't actually want to do. It affects our thoughts and our actions and it is destructive to our relationships and our marriages and our communities.

And the worst thing about it is that we can't stop it. We keep doing the same things, right? Sin is a slave master, the Bible describes it as.

Sin is a slave master, the Bible says, which means that we, by default, live as captives in, like the Israelites did in Egypt, we live as captives in a land of death that we can't escape by nature.

That's the nature we have. And we can't do anything about it by ourselves. It's like one of my deepest fears is the prospect, don't laugh, of being buried alive.

[17 : 36] Okay? I mean, actually, you know what? It's probably not my fear. I think everybody fears the prospect of being buried. Imagine that. It's quite freaky, the idea of being, imagine they think you're dead, they put you in a coffin, they bury you six feet under, they put all the dirt on you, you've got six feet of soil above you, nobody can hear you scream.

And now you wake up and you're in this coffin and you're alive, but there's nothing you can do. You can try to scratch yourself out, you can knock, you can scream, nobody's going to hear you.

Imagine that.

That's a freaky thought, right? And you know that as you're lying there and everybody thinks you're dead and you're actually alive and nobody's going to come, you know, no matter what you do, no matter how hard you scream or knock or scratch, that you're going to die.

You're going to die here unless someone from outside starts digging you out. You need outside help in that situation. Well, I think that's a really good picture of what sin is.

And the situation the Bible says we're all in. We can't break out of the slavery that we're in. And sin is going to kill us eternally unless someone from outside intervenes, unless God intervenes to rescue us.

[18 : 49] And you know what? That's exactly what he did in Jesus. That is why Jesus came here. Because we are buried alive. We cannot get out of here and we're going to eventually, our sin will eventually kill all of us, but for Jesus coming from outside to intervene.

And what he did, just like the Exodus was pointing to, and that lamb that was killed as a substitute for God's people, so Jesus did that for us when he died on the cross.

And his blood paid for our sins, but not just paid for our sins, it rescued us from the slavery to sin we're under. But he, you see what he did there, and we've got to appreciate it again.

And this is why he wants us to go back and remember his death on the cross, because he and I are outside the camp where we belong. And he took our place. He was banished and he became diseased with our infirmity.

He became diseased with our sin in our place, so that no matter how sinful you are, there is a way for you to be cleansed and come back to God, because of what Jesus did outside the camp for you.

[20 : 05] He went outside the camp, even though he was perfect and sinless and holy, so that you, a sinner, can come in. Never forget that. That is the second stage that we see, this rescue from slavery and this reintroduction into God's people.

And then we go to stage three of this leper's restoration, because it wasn't the end of the ritual. It gets weirder.

From verse eight. The person to be cleansed must wash their clothes, shave off all their hair, and bathe with water. Then they will be ceremonially clean.

After this, they may come into the camp, but they must stay outside their tent for seven days. On the seventh day, they must shave off all of their hair, and they must shave their head, their beard, their eyebrows, and the rest of their hair.

They must wash their clothes, and bathe themselves with water, and they will be clean. On the eighth day, they must bring two male lambs, and one ewe lamb, a year old, without defect, along with three tenths of an ephir, a finest flower mixed with olive oil, for a grain offering, and one log of oil.

[21 : 20] The priest who pronounces them clean shall present both the one to be cleansed, and their offerings before the Lord, at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Okay. So, in summary, this guy has to shave himself of all his hair, wait seven days, do it again, and then, on the eighth day, he is now allowed to enter the people.

Now, why? Why do you have to do that? Again, there are certain health reasons to make sure that the disease doesn't recur, or whatever, but actually, there's also deep symbolic meaning to this.

We know, when we hear the word seven in the Bible, that it is significant. It's one of those biblical numbers, because it refers back to creation, the seven days of creation.

God made the world in seven days. And then, when we read of the eighth day, what that is to remind an ancient Israelite, they would have known what the significance of the eighth day. The eighth day is the day that you circumcise a newborn baby, where he officially enters into God's people, Israel.

[22 : 33] And then, finally, this shaving off of all the hair is not just hygiene, and it's also symbolic of actually being born again as a little, new, naked baby.

And so, this is actually a process of recreation, if you take all these symbols into account. Over seven days, this man is actually being recreated, and then brought into God's people again on the eighth day, just like a baby would have been.

And for the leper, just think about how the leper would have experienced this. For the leper, this is a profound symbol, and an assurance that he is no longer a leper.

He is getting a new identity. He is starting a new life among God's people. But you know, that's exactly how the Bible describes it, when someone is saved by Jesus through faith.

when a person comes to faith in Christ, they don't just believe in Jesus and carry on living as before.

[23 : 46] Did you know that? When a person comes to faith in Christ, they don't just, okay, now I believe in Christ, and I'm going to keep on living the life that I was living. No, listen to some of these verses.

Listen to John 3. We heard it earlier. Where is that? John chapter 3. It's when Jesus is talking to Nicodemus.

He says this. Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God, unless they are, notice this, born again.

Unless they start a new life, is what Jesus is saying. 2 Corinthians 5.17, we read the same kind of thing. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.

The old has gone. The new is here. Let me read to you another verse from 1 Peter. He says this. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 52] In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

You see what he's saying there for Christians who come to faith in Christ? He's saying that this new life that begins in us is a life that cannot be killed.

Think about that. When you become a Christian, you receive a new, you start a new life. You are born again and this life cannot be killed and it is what will cause a Christian to rise physically again from the dead like Jesus did and we know that's true because Jesus did it.

He showed us what is going to happen to someone with that new life in them. That's amazing. You have that assurance if you have that new life in you now that it can't be killed, that it will cause you to rise like Jesus rose but how do you know you have that new life in you now?

Well, it changes how you live now. It gives you new desires, new priorities, and a new power to live God's way. Which leads us to the fourth and final stage in this man's cleansing in Leviticus.

[26 : 14] One final strange ritual we read about in chapter 14 from verse 14. The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed and on the thumb of the right hand and on the big toe of the right foot.

The priest shall then take some of the log of oil, pour it on the palm of his own left hand, dip his right forefinger into the oil in his palm and with his finger sprinkle some of it before the Lord seven times. The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot and on top of the blood of the guilt offering.

Now, if you think all of these, this ritual is just for hygienic purposes, right? Oh no, there's no symbolism, it's just hygienic. Really?

Well, what's with oil on the right ear and the thumb and the foot? No, of course, there's deep symbolism to this which we need to understand. Now, this whole idea of putting something on the right earlobe and the right thumb and the right toe, you might recognize if you've been listening carefully so far.

[27 : 28] It comes from Leviticus 8 which Dylan preached on a few weeks ago with the priests. Remember that? When the priests are consecrated for service in the temple, the same thing happens.

They have to have blood put on the ear, the thumb and the toe and the whole point of that was as a reminder that they are being claimed head to toe by God for His service and that they have to have ears that now listen to God completely, hands that work for God completely and feet that walk in the way of God completely.

That was the symbolism. But what's strange now is it's done for a leper that is healed even though he is not a priest. priest. Why? Well, because he is being born again into a nation of priests. Remember, Israel were told by God they are to be a nation of priests to the world and so it's not just the priests in Israel. They were the priests for the Israelites but actually the whole nation was meant to be priests.

They were meant to represent God who they were in a relationship with to the world around them and so this man now being born into a nation of priests is reminded that he is being claimed completely by God for God's service because that is what being one of God's people actually means.

[29 : 04] When you are brought into relationship with God and born again into his people you are actually claimed by God for his service on earth to be his ambassador to the world both then and today.

When we become born again and start this new life it is a life to be lived head to toe for God. That is what being a Christian truly is.

Let me make it abundantly clear being a Christian is not coming to church on a Sunday. That is part of it. Being a Christian is not marking on a form in home affairs that your religious affiliation is Christian.

Being a Christian is not just I was baptized once. Being a Christian repeatedly in the Bible is defined as a person who has been claimed head to toe by God saved and called to his purpose.

Listen to some verses that teach us that Titus Titus 2 from verse 14 says this listen to this Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people who are his very own eager to do what is good.

[30 : 52] That is why Jesus redeems people from wickedness to purify for himself a people that he owns that are his very own. And then 1 Peter 2 verse 9 says this but you Peter is talking to Christians he says but you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation God's special possession possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Look at some of those words God's special possession God owns people that he saves he owns them there is his now to do with what he wants in the world a royal priesthood that is what Christians are called now we are called and set aside to represent God to the world for his service that is actually the point of being saved the point of being saved is not just so we can go to heaven one day the point of being saved is to be God's people on earth now and if that's true what that means is until you come to the point of living your life completely head to toe for God you're not yet fully saved you haven't come fully along that path the process may have started you believe in Christ you've been forgiven of your sins that's wonderful but the goal of that is to live a life consecrated to God and that is where all truly saved people end up and the Bible assures us if God has truly started that work in you he will see it through to completion you know what that implies it's not complete yet okay when we get that assurance when God has started a good work in you he will see it through to completion that's telling us that if God has chosen you and called you're not there yet you're not what God saved you for yet and we all need to come to that point of being completely totally head to toe consecrated to God that's the goal that he saved us for because think think about when you leave a job say you change your job right you start to work for a new company and you resign your old job I'm sure many of you have gone through that stage you've sent in your resignation letter and then you leave your last day at work and then you start your new job when you start your new job right you don't keep doing your old job you don't sit at your desk in your new office and then phone clients from your old work to keep on following up on them you completely move away from your old job and start fully devoted to your new job that is what it also means to be saved by

God for a new life those God has saved are called to be all in to the new job God has saved us for and that is why he gives us amazing resources to do that job in his Holy Spirit God gives his Holy Spirit to us to enable us for the new life that he calls us to and that is what the oil represented did you notice in this strange ceremony in Leviticus 14 that if you were listening carefully the priest was

to paint blood on the ear and the thumb and the toe but then he was to cover that in oil as well and do the whole thing again but with oil now in the Old Testament oil almost always refers to the Holy Spirit God's holy empowering Spirit in people to do his work on earth and so blood was first put on and then oil was put on again so what that is saying to the leper is that he is purified head and toe for

God but then he is also consecrated not just purified but also now consecrated and empowered for this new life and it's the same with Christians you don't actually have such a thing as a Christian with one and not the other you don't have a true Christian who is purified!

[35 : 08] but not consecrated because if you are forgiven by his blood you also receive his spirit to live the new life and do the new work in his kingdom he is calling us to and so do you see how each stage of this leper's process is actually talking about our journey to life and eternity and so we come to the end of the process and we see that the one who imagine what it was like maybe for years he's been outside by himself and he hasn't seen his children grow up and he's heard the laughter of the camp for years but he's never been able to partake and now he comes home and he sees his family and there must have been a huge party right when this happens the one who is living in the nether world of death comes back to life and he's reconnected with God and with his people well that's also our story it's how we are too it's what

Jesus has done for us in Jesus God has made a way for each one of us no matter who we are no matter what we've done no matter how far away from God you might be right now God has made a way I want you to and Jesus did that by coming into our world taking on our disease of sin cleansing us giving us new birth into a real eternal life and then giving us his Holy Spirit to equip us to live that life head to toe for him that is the journey of salvation that we as Christians need to keep moving forward on every day but maybe you're sitting here or listening to this and you realize you haven't even started that journey yet maybe you still know you're outside the camp you are cut off from God you have no relationship with

God well I want to ask you what are you waiting for Jesus has done it all he's opened the way come to Christ trust in him and start following him to life that is why he came there is nothing to lose starting this journey except your slavery and your sin and there is everything to gain let's pray Lord God we thank you for your holy inspired word and that even in these ancient chapters about skin disease you are showing us Christ you are showing us life you are calling us home in every page of scripture Lord you are calling us home and we thank you amen