

The Atoning Blood and the Anointing Oil

(Leviticus 14)

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Doctors tell us that leprosy varies from country to country and from time to time something like influenza. The ordinary leprosy was a disease which showed itself first on the skin, perhaps of the arm or of the leg. It would become discolored; there would be swelling; there would be tumors or boils and then unpleasant discharges and after a while sometimes the fingers or the toes would fall off.

Now God commanded that if any man seemed to be falling a victim to this plague of leprosy he must be examined by the priest who was instructed in certain medical matters. If the priest came to the conclusion that the poor man without doubt had the leprosy then he had to be excluded from the camp; or later, when they were settled in the land, from his town or village. Outside the camp or the town or village might be three or four huts and the poor man would have to make his way to a hut. You see the truth that as leprosy excluded a man from his home and town, so the plague of sin, of which leprosy is a type, will exclude men from the presence of God and from heaven.

How did these lepers manage to live? Every morning there would be relatives, who would take a basket of food towards those huts, and at a safe distance from them would put that basket down. When they had withdrawn, such lepers as had health and strength to do so would come out, pick up the basket of provisions, take it back to those huts and then prepare the food for them all. If the leper left the huts he had to cry out (as you can see from chapter 13), "Unclean, unclean." That was a warning that no one in health was to go near him. They had to keep at a safe distance because leprosy was infectious and contagious. A touch might convey this dreaded plague.

Very occasionally an inmate of one of the huts would say, "I think I am getting better; my skin is getting a healthier color; those dreadful swellings are beginning to go down; those ulcers, those boils are beginning to dry up." If those symptoms became things of the past, he would say, "I hope I am better; it is an act of God." For no leper is ever healed but by God's special interposition. But before he could go back to his town, to his own home

and loved ones, he had to have the authority from the priest. The priest would go to him and inspect him and if the priest could say, “My dear man, I am so glad to be able to tell you that I think God has intervened. I think your leprosy has left you.” Then he had to go through this ceremony of cleansing.

When our Lord Jesus was on earth He did what no ordinary Israelite would dare to do. He put forth His hand and touched a leper. The leper was healed by His miraculous touch and he then had to go to the priest and offer those things which Moses had commanded (in Lev. 14). What was this? He had to take two live birds — clean; and a piece of cedar wood; and scarlet, a piece of wool that color which would be used to tie together the hyssop, the cleansing and bitter plant. One of the birds was then killed over running water and the living bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet wool, and the hyssop were dipped in the blood of the bird that was killed. The man that was reckoned to be cured of his leprosy was sprinkled seven times and the pronouncement made that he was clean. Then the bird that was not killed was released and of course flew upward into the sky.

These things all speak of the work of the Lord Jesus in curing spiritual lepers. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes it very clear that the blood of bulls and goats, and of birds could not put away sin; but the shedding of their blood pointed forward to that of the Lord Jesus without which we cannot be cleansed from sin, pardoned or accepted by God. The one bird was killed and its blood was shed. The other bird was released and flew upward into the sky. It is the Old Testament picture of the Lord Jesus delivered for our offences (i.e. the bird slain), and raised again on account of our justification (i.e. the bird released and flying into the sky) — a picture of the Lord Jesus rising from the dead followed by His ascension into Heaven. If the Lord Jesus had not died and risen from the dead and ascended up into Heaven, we could never be forgiven or enter Heaven.

But there was a piece of cedar wood; only a small piece, perhaps a foot long. If you read of Solomon’s construction of the Temple (1 Kings 5 & 6), you will see that nearly all the woodwork was of cedar wood. Just a little fir but the majority was cedar. Why cedar wood? I believe it is the only wood that worms will never attack. There is something in the cedar wood which will kill a worm, so the worm keeps at a safe distance from it. That is why cedar wood was employed in the construction of the Temple. It became a symbol of incorruptibility. We are sinful by nature and by practice. We are corruptible beings who have been corrupted. The Lord’s purpose in laying hold of us is to make us incorruptible.

May I remind you of the words in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57? “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (i.e. die), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible (all the sainted dead, laid in their graves will be raised incorruptible when the Lord Jesus descends from heaven), and we shall be changed. For this corruptible (this body which has been the vehicle of sin) must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are corruptible but by the grace of God a day will come when pardoned, healed, restored, forgiven, there will be a spirit made perfect in holiness in a resurrection body, incorruptible. There will be no sinful passion passing through the resurrection body and if the Lord Jesus comes before we die we shall never die at all. We will be changed. This mortal body will be made like unto His glorious body. That is the suggestion behind the piece of cedar wood. God has for believers that goal of being so free from sin that we shall be incorruptible even as our Lord Jesus. His body saw no corruption.

Then there was the piece of scarlet: it is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a piece of scarlet wool. Scarlet in Scripture indicates a great and important difference. In the story of the capture of Jericho, Rahab was told to gather her family into her home and put a piece of scarlet thread in the window. Her house was like other houses except that it had a scarlet thread — and that made all the difference. This is a reminder that the Lord Jesus in working for the salvation of His people became man; was like us in many ways; born of a mother, a babe at first, feeling hunger and pain. But there was a big difference. Whilst He had an earthly mother He had no earthly father. And there was another big difference. Whilst we are born sinful, in Him was no sin. And there was a third big difference. We are just human beings but He was Perfect God and Perfect Man. We can thank God that the Lord Jesus partook of flesh and blood. We can thank God still more that there was not sin in Him. He had a good foster-father, Joseph, but He had no real earthly father. That is just what that scarlet thread is meant to suggest to us.

Then there was the hyssop, a little plant not bigger than a bunch of parsley, perhaps wound round the end of a piece of cedar wood with that scarlet wool. It was dipped in the blood in order that the leper now healed might be sprinkled with the blood. It was used in the Jewish economy to represent bitterness at the passover feast. There was a little hyssop and the head of the family would say of it, “This is the bitterness in which our fathers suffered in the land of Egypt.” The Lord Jesus bore all the bitterness, the suffering for our sinfulness and sins that we might never have to suffer in hell but have the bliss of heaven.

When that ceremony had been performed the man was allowed to enter his camp or town but not his home. A whole week had to pass. It is a reminder to us that as the sick, seeming to be getting better, may have a relapse, so it is possible for a person to show all the appearances of conviction of sin and a genuine trust in the Saviour and yet for it to be superficial. As there could be a relapse with the human malady so we have to be careful in spiritual matters. For some can be so impressed that perhaps unintentionally they deceive others and themselves. Simon Magus deceived the apostles. We learn from the parable of the sower that there are some who believe., for a while. What a solemn and heart-searching fact that is. Touched by a sermon or something else, apparently under true conviction of sin, and trusting in Christ; yet after a year or so all those impressions are gone. So this man was kept under observation for a whole week and at the end of that time the priest saw him again. If he was satisfied that there was no relapse and he had really been cured of this leprosy then he had to bring a number of offerings with some oil.

It would require a series of studies to notice the significance of these different offerings. Five are set before us in the Book of Leviticus—the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the trespass offering and the sin offering. Each one emphasized some aspect of the atoning work of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ, and the response that work should have from souls touched by grace.

This leper had to have these various sacrifices. Without going into these verses in detail, let me mention the main thoughts connected with them. The burnt offering typifies the Lord Jesus giving Himself utterly to the will of God. He said “Lo I come to do Thy will O My God,” and if grace touches our hearts so that we respond rightly we shall say “Lord, I want to do the whole will of God and nothing but the will of God whatever the cost.”

The meal or food offering shows that whatever we do to earn our bread and butter or our keep we should do all to the glory of God. The Lord Jesus lived to the glory of God from the first moment He drew breath. What a Son He must have been—to His foster-father Joseph and His loving mother Mary. They never had to correct Him or reprove Him for a temper or telling a lie, or for being disobedient. When He became the carpenter—worked with carpenters’ tools, perhaps sold certain things, received money for repairing a piece of furniture, making a door—He did everything to the glory of God. If that aspect of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus comes home to our souls we will say, “Lord, that is how I want to live, not to the glory of self, but to the glory of Thy dear Son.”

There was the peace offering. That should lead us to think we now have peace with God instead of enmity. We value and enjoy this peace because we know what it was before. And as much as lieth in us we must be at peace with all men and especially with brethren in Christ. The trespass offering reminds us that when our conscience smites us for something wrong, we have to put that right as far as we can. The sin offering speaks of the Lord Jesus being made sin (or the sin offering) for us. All these offerings are brought together in Isaiah 53. We cannot dwell too much on the offering of the Lord Jesus, its various aspects, and the effect it should have upon our souls.

After these offerings the blood and the oil were put on the right ear, the right thumb, and the right toe. See that man cured of his leprosy given permission by the priest to go back to his family. There is the mark of blood and the mark of oil on his ear and thumb and toe.

Oh beloved, these have spiritual counterparts for us. The blood speaks of that of the Lord Jesus shed on Calvary. It speaks of the awfulness of sin, for if there had been no sin there would have been no agony for the Lord Jesus on Calvary’s tree. It says to us, “You must hate the sin and make no quarter with it. You must resist it, fight it, overcome it.” The oil in Scripture speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit. It has the same message for the Holy Spirit convicts of sin and leads us to hate it. The Holy Spirit works to glorify the Lord Jesus.

What is the application? The blood and the oil on the ear teaches us to be careful what we listen to. We should only listen to that which harmonizes with the blood and the oil. This

is going to affect our conduct and character. If there is nasty and unkind talk or filthy disgusting talk (which is on the increase), the blood and the oil will say that is the abominable thing which God hates and we will do something about it. Is it on the radio? Then we will turn it off very quickly. I do not listen to the radio. It has too much of the world, but I like to hear the weather report and the news. I am utterly disgusted with the five-minute program supposed to be a little Christian message for the day. Usually there is not a word of God or of Christ, and there is rarely a reference to the blood of Christ or the work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, I think there is no Christianity about most of these five-minute talks. If it is on the lips of those around us we will watch for our opportunity and as wisely and as prayerfully as possible make our protest so as to bring it to an end. This is a test to apply to a church and to a pulpit in particular. When we listen to a sermon is much made of the blood of Christ? Is much made of the Holy Spirit?

Then the blood and the oil were on the thumb. It teaches that I ought not to do anything that is contrary to Christ or to the Holy Spirit. Like Dorcas, we may use our fingers to make things for others in Christ's name. We will go about our home and business duties in a way which is never contrary to the will of Christ or of the Spirit of God. I remember that when I was a young man at Portsmouth, dockers and sailors who were free would play cards. I was often asked "Is it right to play cards? You do not play." If the blood and the oil are on our thumb we will not go in for card games. They often lead to playing for money, only a little to start with, then it is generally increased. No, that is not of God; and if this were more generally proclaimed and appreciated there would not be robbery taking place, such as we often hear. Thieves seizing wages or money from a Post Office or Bank. We would want our hands to do only such things as Jesus did when He was on earth.

Also, the blood and the oil were on the toe (the foot). Surely this teaches us that we will only wish to go to those places and do those things which are not contrary to the will of Christ, Who shed His blood, and of the Holy Spirit, Who renews our souls. At classes years ago I was often asked, "Is it right to go to a dance?" There was a minister and he had a young peoples' fellowship. He had just been appointed and one of his first engagements was to meet this fellowship to draw up a plan for the future program. They decided to have one or two missionaries come and tell of their work in foreign lands. They wanted one or two slide lectures. Then one person said "Could we have one or two dances? other churches have them." he said "Oh, I would not like that." Well, he was new to them and they did not like to press it. The next year came and a program had to be arranged. Again two or three seemed anxious for a dance, but he managed to pass it off. The third year came and once more the matter was raised. One said "Some people do not come to our fellowship because there is no dancing, whereas in so and so church they have two or three dances and they get a very fine membership." He felt he could not pass it off as he had on previous occasions so he said, "We will have to meet again next week. Give me a week to think about it." So the week passed. They met and the matter was raised. He said "I have been thinking a lot about it and I have decided you can have two dances." Some faces were all smiles, but when he continued "The young men can have their dance on one evening and the young women can have their dance another evening," those smiles changed into frowns. So he asked, "Why, what is the matter?" "Well, we

wanted dancing.” “Have I not said you can have dancing?” “Oh, but that is not dancing.” He said “My dear young friends you have reminded me that there was dancing in the Bible — so that there can be nothing wrong with dancing. I agree. But Bible dancing is very different from modern dancing. Bible dancing was young men dancing with young men and young women dancing with young women. Miriam and her young maidens danced and as they did so they sang praises to the Lord. Now I have no objection to that dancing but we cannot have anything to do with the mixed dancing of today.”

Sometimes I have been asked about going to a cinema or a theatre. I have never been but I know that there are a lot of nasty things in such places. Consider an actor having to appear before God at the close of his life and may we with reverence think of the Lord saying to him, “What did you do when you were on earth?” “I was an actor.” “What parts did you act?” “Well, I acted as a murderer or as a seducer in some play or other.” I believe there is not an actor who will be happy confessing the truth in that day. We must not act sin. But that is what the theatre is doing. It is contrary to the blood and the oil on the ear, the thumb and the toe. As we look on things along these lines we see that if the atoning work of the Lord Jesus has a bearing on our soul, it is going to greatly affect our character and conduct.

It must not be overlooked that the leper had to wash his clothes. When I was young, elderly people often used to call their clothes their habit. What clothes are to the body, habits are to the soul. There is a distinct application here that if we are brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer we must wash our clothes. In other words we must look into our habits. Are there any bad habits brought over from our unconverted days? They have to be washed. The poor leper’s boils and ulcers discharged their poisonous matter into the garments next to the skin, so that when they took that garment off it had to be washed clean. An old hymn says, “How many a spot defiles the robe that wraps an earthly saint.” If there is a quick temper or something else that is not Christlike we have to watch it. The apostle had this in mind: “Now ye also put off all these (as you would put off your coat), anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication” (Colossians 3:8).

It seems to me that if there are some good things on television (a few, not many) and on the radio, there is a great deal of blasphemy, swear words, the filthy communication. We have to watch and see that the radio and television are not on all the time. If we have the news or a wedding of some member of the Royal Family, or a visit to some famous old castle, there may be no harm, but there is a great deal of harm in many things which come from the media. God’s Word also says: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies (i.e. a tender heart), kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another.” We have some washing to do.

Then the leper had to shave off all his hair. You see, all the germs love to congregate at the spot where the hair comes out of the skin. Moses knew this medical matter long before our doctors taught it. God told him. The best way of getting rid of those germs was to shave. Are there any unspiritual germs which we are carrying about from our unconverted days? Have we some shaving to do? Last of all, there is a distinction without a difference. He had to wash himself in water that he may be clean. There is the washing

from the guilt of sin which is only by the precious blood of Jesus. But there is a washing from sinful things which we have to do. Listen to Isaiah 1:16: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.”

I remember a dear Irishman, William Nicholson, who stayed in my home and told me that as a young man he was a clerk in an office in Belfast. In a large business many would write their private letters on the office notepaper, use an office envelope and then put them in with the business letters so that they had an office stamp. So their correspondence and postage never cost them a penny. When he was converted he heard from a sermon on the trespass offering in Leviticus that something not right in God’s sight must be put right. He was very troubled and thought he should have to tell the manager. He was afraid he would be sacked. He tried to put it off, but his conscience gave him a most unhappy time, so at last he wrote a confession to the manager and asked if he might see him the following day. He fully expected that would be his last day in the firm. In the morning he had a message that the manager wanted to see him. The manager said, “I have had your letter and I have read your confession. What has made you write like that to me?” William Nicholson felt he must tell the manager that the Lord had met with him and he had to put wrong things in his life right. He said, “Sir, I am ready to pay you whatever you think I ought to pay — the cost of notepaper and stamps.” The manager said “Are you never going to do it again?” and he said “No sir, never.” “Then very well, I am going to overlook it. I am very touched to think that you should come and confess to me and try to right the wrong.”

Beloved, the cleansing of the leper has its spiritual counterparts for you and for me, and we have looked at some of them. God give us grace to put them into practice.

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