

I'LL FLY AWAY

LEVITICUS 14:1-57

ONLY JESUS CAN SET US FREE FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN AND ALL ITS EFFECTS

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I'll Fly Away

Leviticus 14:1-57

Last time we were together, we talked about some occasions that would require people to act with personal integrity. If an ulcerated sore appeared anywhere on a Hebrew's body, they were required to report to the priest for an examination of the infected area. This condition was referred to in Hebrew as *tsaraat*.

But this wasn't just a human condition. This word also referred to a mould or mildew that showed up on cloth material, leather, or wool. In today's passage, it will also refer to houses when the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

It is also important to remember that the appearance of these conditions does not mean that the person or the materials are automatically unclean. The priest must examine each case separately. The first part of this morning's passage describes people who had appeared before the priest and had been declared unclean. The unclean person was required to live outside the camp, wear torn clothes, leave their hair uncombed and uncut. They were to cry out in a loud voice, "Unclean!" in order to warn healthy people not to come near them. They lived in physical, emotional, and spiritual isolation. At the beginning of this morning's text, it seems as if the assumption is that they will someday heal. The first part of this morning's text describes how the person once again reenters the Hebrew community after their disease has gone away.

The thing I want to emphasize is this. It wasn't an individual call; it wasn't a public opinion call, or anything else. Only the priest could declare a person to be clean. Let me give you a real example, a true example of how judgments are not based on public opinion or perception but by official decree by a designated official.

I have a pastor friend who let's say has a reputation for driving a little reckless and kind of a street-racer like style. ... O.k. it's not a friend, it's me. I think the perception and public opinion in this congregation is that I may tend to drive a little fast sometimes. In other words, if I were to take a show of hands, most people would say that I was a bit reckless and a bit fast, right?

Well, it really doesn't matter what anybody thinks. (Show certificate) I have here in my hand a letter from the Office of the Secretary of State of Illinois. It is signed by the Secretary of State, Jesse White. Let me just read you one sentence in the letter that is addressed personally to me. It has my name, my driver's license number, and my date of birth on it. It is clearly addressed to me. The letter starts out, "**Congratulations!** You are eligible to take part in our Safe Driver Sticker Renewal Program."

Did you get that? The Secretary of the State of Illinois has identified me as a safe driver. He is the one who issues licenses. So even if 100 % of all of you though I was a let's say less than safe driver, it wouldn't matter. Only the judgment of the Secretary of State matters.

You can see why God demanded high standards of the priests. The fate of individuals and of the community rested in their hands based on the decisions they made.

Again, not only do I want us to understand what these ceremonies meant for the Hebrews, I would like for us to understand what they mean for us. The main idea for us this morning is this.

ONLY JESUS CAN SET US FREE FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN AND ALL ITS CONSEQUENCES. Personally, when I see these ceremonies, I can't help but see how they clearly point to the mission and ministry of Jesus.

I. BEING MADE WHOLE (VS 1-32)

Jesus Is The Only Answer To Our Overwhelming Burdens.

Verses 1-32 illustrate the procedure used in an unclean person once again being made whole. For us, the message is clear. **JESUS IS THE ONLY ANSWER TO OUR OVERWHELMING BURDENS.**

A. An Approach To Suffering (1-2)

I'd like to use verses 1-2 to suggest for us an approach to suffering. In the life of an individual person, we don't know how much time would elapse between the time they were declared to be unclean by the priest and moved outside of the community to a place of loneliness and alienation. They would be separated from their friends, their family, from society, and from worship at the Tabernacle.

Let me just recap some of the things we said last time. If the Hebrew received one of these diseases and was declared to be unclean, their first assumption would be that they had sinned, offended God, and were now being punished. We said that this was a legitimate thought pattern. There are plenty of instances where God disciplines His people in this manner. So sin is clearly one of the reasons we find ourselves suffering in life. God punished Moses' sister in this very way.

But we can't stop there. The Hebrew literature also states with equal force that sometimes we suffer for being holy. Sometimes the suffering comes as a test or for a way to strengthen us. The book of Job describes this type of suffering.

I suggested a third possibility. Sometimes we suffer simply because we live in a sinful world and bad things just happen. The Hebrews never would have accepted this option and I'm less convinced of this as I grow older. But there clearly are things that happen to us simply as a part of life. For example, we will all get old, get sick, and die. We will all lose loved ones; watch loved ones suffer, etc. You get the idea.

But I do agree with the Hebrews in that God is either the direct cause of the suffering or if He is not, the suffering is in our life only with His permission. So when any of us face suffering, we must first acknowledge that the suffering we are presently facing is in our life only with God's permission. The suffering did not catch Him by surprise. The unclean person living outside the camp had plenty of time to think and to reflect on his or her life. And these first two verses seem to assume that there is a good possibility of healing and restoration.

Here are some of the things that I think will help us to successfully go through suffering. We should first memorize Romans 8:28:

¹²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (NLT).

So our basic faith acknowledgment is that no matter what the occasion for suffering is, God will use it for good if we continue to focus on loving Him and seeking to do His will. In other words, there will be times that we can clearly identify why we are suffering, but there will be many times we can't. The best thing is to simply embrace the suffering and trust that God will complete the good work He started in us when He either brought the suffering or allowed the suffering into our lives. The other part of this attitude is to acknowledge that we are helpless to deal with this suffering or to fix it on our own. The outcome and the timing are totally in God's hand. We should intentionally humble ourselves and submit to His work and His timing.

Now let's get to the method for going through suffering. I'm not saying this is the only way. These are just my personal suggestions.

1. Since there is always sin our lives, we can use this as an occasion to reflect on our sin, confess our sin, and repent of our sin. Since our hearts are wicked and deceitful, we should ask God to search us and reveal to us sin we need to deal with.
2. Since we often find ourselves alone during these times, it is a good chance for us to be quiet, humble, reflective, and open to God.
3. Remind ourselves that God is in control. This did not catch God by surprise and He intends to work it out for good, even though we may never understand it all in this life.
4. We must force ourselves to focus on God and to continually state and restate our commitment to loving Him and trusting Him.
5. Along with this, we must trust in God's wisdom and timing. To fight against God is to fight against the only One who can deliver us.
6. Develop the fruit of patience, humility, and joyfulness.
7. Learn to depend on others for intercession and help. When a Hebrew man was declared unclean and sent outside the camp, his family would be dependent on the mercy and graciousness of friends and relatives to help them and support them. Here's a warning. If you are a person who cannot ask for help or allow others to do things for you, you may be headed for some real suffering.
8. Plan to take what you learn with you and implement it into your life even after the suffering has gone.
9. Learn to lean on God's strength alone. When the Apostle Paul asked God to take his suffering away, God said to him, "My strength is sufficient for you." Suffering is a way for us to come to the realization that Jesus is all we need because during those times, Jesus is all we have.

I'm sure there are many more tips and methods, but I think we can see that it would be fruitless to waste our time while suffering by letting negative thinking make the suffering worse. Well here at the end of verse 2, the person realizes he has gotten better, but remember that decision is not his to make. He sends for the priest to come and examine him.

B. A Response To Freedom From Suffering (3-7)

Verses 3-7 describe the ceremony that is a response to the freedom from suffering. This is something we should pay attention to more. Oftentimes, when we are healed or relieved from our suffering, we just go back to our lifestyles. Unfortunately, we go back without even saying thank you or acknowledging God. But the Hebrew realized the miracle of healing. The unclean person has been alienated and suffering physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They knew what it meant to be cut off. Jesus often suffered this alienation while He lived here on earth. Much of His suffering was done alone and when abandoned by His friends and rejected by His people, He experienced all this alienation.

Let's try to capture some the excitement the Hebrew felt once healed and restored. In order for us to really understand grace, we must first acknowledge how totally evil and hopeless we are.

In verse 3 the priest goes outside the camp to examine the person. Notice that the priest is not a doctor nor are these rituals meant to heal the infected person. The priest merely inspects the person and either affirms or denies that authentic healing has taken place. If the person has been healed, it is totally attributed to God. Therefore the rituals are meant to give glory to God as the healer and to bring the outcast person back into the community. It would also be a reminder to him or her of where he or she has come from, a place and life of desolation back to the living.

Once the priest examines the person and pronounces him or her to be clean, the following ceremony takes place. The priest takes a bird, rips its head off over running water, and catches the blood and water mixture in a clay pot. He then puts a piece of cedar wood, a piece of scarlet yarn, and hyssop into the pot. Into this mixture of blood, water, hyssop, yarn and wood, the

priest takes a live bird and dips it into the pot. He takes some of the liquid and sprinkles it seven times on the person who has been healed. He then takes the bird and releases it into an open field. The bird flies away.

First let's talk about some of the ingredients. Let me state my intention first. I think the Hebrew nation lived between the Passover in Egypt to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The first ingredient is a sacrificial animal and the scarlet yarn. A clean bird was chosen for the sacrifice. Clean animals were used as a substitute for human sin. In other words, the human should be punished for his or her own sin. God told Adam and Eve the punishment for sin was death.

The scarlet yarn may refer to a lamb from which the wool to make the yarn came from. Red may refer to the blood stained lamb when they were executed for sacrifice. On the original Passover night, the Hebrews were required to sacrifice a lamb. Jesus was our sacrificial Passover Lamb. The violent death of the bird reminds us of the killing of the lamb at Passover and the violent death they avoided as God slaughtered the firstborn in every Egyptian household. The Hebrews deserved the same fate. We also deserve to be killed just like the Egyptians.

Cedar wood was thrown into the pot during this ceremony. Since cedar wood was so hard, it could have been used to frame out doors on houses. The Hebrews were required to sprinkle the blood of their Passover lamb on the doorposts and over the door of their houses. When the Angel of Death saw the blood, he passed over that house without judging it. Jesus was crucified on a wooden cross. His hands were nailed through as was His feet. He was beaten and forced to wear a crown of thorns on His head. The blood pattern would look like the Hebrew household on the original Passover; blood on the top and blood on the sides.

In this cleansing ceremony, hyssop was thrown into the pot. The Hebrews applied the blood to their doorposts with brushes made of hyssop. As Jesus was about to die, a sponge of wine vinegar was raised to His lips on a hyssop stalk. Jesus wet His lips and died.

The bird in this ceremony was slaughtered over running water. Actually in the Hebrew it is called living water. Jesus often referred to Himself as living water. At the first Passover, God parted the Red Sea for the Hebrews to pass through on dry land. On both sides of them were walls of living water. When the Hebrews passed safely through and the Egyptian Army entered, God closed up the sea and brought death to the entire Egyptian Army by means of living water.

And how about the bird that was dipped in this bloody mixture and set free? The Passover lamb was slain and its blood put on the doorposts of the Hebrews. The lambs died, the firstborn in every Egyptian household died, and the entire Egyptian Army died. Can you imagine the excitement the Hebrews felt when they saw the Red Sea close up and kill the entire army while they were safe on the other side? Exodus 15 records the song they sang, but let me just quote the first couple of lines from verses 1-2:

¹ Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD:

'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;

He has thrown both horse and rider into the sea.

² The LORD is my strength and my song;

He has become my victory.

He is my God, and I will praise him;

He is my father's God, and I will exalt him! ...'" (NLT).

Let's think for a moment how the healed person felt when he saw that bird fly away free. Can we even begin to imagine the emotion that overwhelmed the person as she thought to herself, "It's finally over. I'm going home. I was dead but now I'm alive again. I will once again enjoy my family, my friends, social gatherings, and I'll once again be able to participate in worship at the Tabernacle. I can't even begin to understand the overwhelming emotions of joy that person would experience as the bird flew away.

But I know I should focus on that emotion. Jesus was the bird that was slaughtered. He was slaughtered for my sin. When I came to faith in Jesus, I was dipped in His blood. He died and

was buried. I was dead but then was given life and I flew away free; free from my sin, free from the penalty of my sin, free from the bondage of Satan's dominion of fear and death. It would do us good to read the passion portions of the Gospels, and come to the point that Jesus did that, suffered that, and submitted Himself to suffering, humiliation, torture, and death so I could be free.

I'm pretty sure the author of the song, I'll Fly Away, was referring to physical death, but I think it also applies to our salvation when we come to new life in Christ. Listen to the words of the second verse. Picture us lying in the dirt, filth, and blood of our sin. Then picture Jesus being crucified, then God dipping us in Jesus' blood and setting us free:

"When the shadows of this life have gone,

I'll fly away.

Like a bird from prison bars has flown,

I'll fly away."

Jesus died so that we could be free. Every time we see a bird fly away, we should remember that we can fly away because Jesus set us free.

C. An Approach To Life (8-9)

That naturally leads to verses 8-9 where the healed person no doubt finds a new approach to life. This person knew what he or she was missing having been alienated and forced to live outside the community. I'm pretty sure that the person would be very careful not to sin and ever end up in that kind of situation again. The person was required at this point to shave off all their body hair and bathe. At this point the person could enter the camp, but still not allowed to enter their own tent. And at the end of seven days, he or she would once again have to shave off all their hair and again wash.

I have no idea why God brought them back in stages. I'm only guessing when I say this. Do you remember I said that the Hebrews lived between the original Passover and the cross of Jesus? I think that we Christians now live between the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus and the 2nd Coming of Jesus. In other words, we are now alive in Christ. We are ceremonially clean now. In other words, by the death and resurrection, God applied Jesus' holiness to us. We now live in the camp. But we won't be perfectly clean and holy until the day we die and see Jesus face to face. So in a sense, we live in a state of already, but not yet. We are like this Hebrew, living in the camp, but not yet home.

The interesting thing is that this person knew he was headed home. He had time to think about where he had come from and where he was going. With that same excitement, we should often reflect on where we came from, sin and death. We should often reflect on where we are. We are redeemed but being perfected day by day. We should often reflect on where we are going. We are going to be at home with the Lord in heaven one day where we will be perfect.

D. An Appreciation Of God's Grace (10-32)

Verses 10-32 describe the appreciation of God's grace. On the 8th day, the person was then allowed back into the community fully. But the first place the person went was not home, but to the worship Tabernacle. Here she offered up sacrifices. We have studied through all these sacrifices but note the order and I will comment briefly on each one. First the Guilt Offering was offered up. If you remember this was a sacrifice in which the offender was required to make restitution. The person paid back what he or she owed. In this case, they were offering up to God what they intentionally or unintentionally missed giving Him.

Next the sin offering was given. In this case the person confessed their sin and offered up their repentance.

Finally the burnt offering was offered up. The burnt offering was symbolic of giving my whole life to God. Think about how this applies to both the Hebrew in this text and how it applies to us as the Apostle Paul said:

"¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Romans 12:1-2 / NLT).

One other interesting thing I'd like to mention in passing is that the priest took blood from the sacrifice and anointed the right ear, thumb, and toe of the restored person. He also took oil and anointed the ear, thumb, and toe of the individual. The blood symbolized the atonement, the dedication of the whole person to God. The oil symbolized God's Holy Spirit. From now on, this person would no doubt totally dedicate himself to listening for and hearing God's will. She would dedicate herself to doing God's will. They would be very careful to walk in God's ways. They would be very careful never to have to return to a state of exile because of willful or careless sin.

I wish that we could take this as a model of how we should live. I should be so grateful for what Jesus has done for me on the cross, that I ought to be very careful not to willfully or carelessly sin against Him. I should be frightened to be fooled by Satan and the world. I should be committed to living free in Christ. The truth this section reminds us of is this. **JESUS IS THE ONLY ANSWER TO OUR OVERWHELMING BURDENS.**

II. TRUST AND OBEDIENCE (VS 33-53)

Trust And Obedience Are The Only Ways To Access The Healing Power Of Jesus.

Verses 33-35 show that the only way to enjoying life is to trust and obey God. **TRUST AND OBEDIENCE ARE THE ONLY WAYS TO ACCESS THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS.**

A. A Test Of Our Obedience (33-35)

In this section, even though the Hebrews are living in tents, God gives them commands for when they enter and conquer the Promised Land. They will be living in houses they inherited from the people they would drive out. In verses 33-35 God informs them there will be tests of obedience. Again, the responsibility lies with the owner of the house. If mould or mildew grew on a small portion of his wall, no one would know. He was responsible to report it to the priest. The word for mildew here is that same Hebrew word *tsaraat*. So the scenario is this. One day a couple wakes up and they notice this patch of mildew growing on a stone. It now became a test of their personal integrity whether or not they would report it. Again, let me emphasize that it is a matter for us of personal integrity to be confessing our sins one to another.

B. God's Care For Our Needs (36)

In difficult times, it is important to remember that God cares for our needs as described in verse 36. In order that everything not be lost, God commanded people to take all their possessions outside the house before the priest got there. Once the priest declares the house unclean, then everything in the house becomes unclean. By allowing them to take their valuables out first, God was protecting them financially.

In our own personal walk, there is no integrity involved when someone is caught in sin, and then confesses. It is always much better to confess your sin. God will provide care afterwards. If a

priest just happened by the house and saw the mildew, everything in the house would be declared unclean.

C. Testing And Blessing (37-42)

In verses 37-42 we will see how testing and blessing go together. There is absolutely no doubt. When you called the priest, there would be a lot of follow up work and some financial liability. The priest would check and mark the mildewed area. If after 7 days, the mildew grew, the people would be required to remove the infected stones and replace them with new stones. Everything would have to be scraped and washed.

Here is an interesting twist. Some ancient rabbis said that this was a test and a reward by God. They said that God often revealed hidden treasure left behind by the Canaanites when the Hebrews drove them out. God would cause mildew to grow on a stone. When the Hebrews removed the infected stone, they would find gold and other treasures left behind.

I don't know about all that, but I do know if we live with integrity, trust God, and obey Him, we will enjoy many blessings.

D. Gaining A Proper Perspective (43-47)

Verses 43-47 help us to gain a proper perspective. We live in such a materialistic world and many of us Christians have bought into the world's philosophy of chasing after money and other things. We have come to equate God's blessings with health and wealth. In these verses, if the mildew once again grew back, the owners would have to tear the entire house down stone by stone, haul the stones and other building materials out of town. They would have to build themselves a new home. They would be forced to remind themselves that living free in the Promised Land was better than living as slaves in Egyptian houses. I'm sure that's a challenge for us as well. We do need to constantly remind ourselves that Jesus has set us free. Everything else in life is a bonus.

E. An Appreciation Of God's Grace (48-53)

Verses 48-53 again describe a ceremony that describes an appreciation of God's grace. If the mildew did not spread or grow back, the house was declared clean. The same bird ceremony was performed as an act of thanksgiving and recognition of God's care and provision. Again, how can we describe the emotion of the homeowners as they saw that bird fly away free? Jesus promises us abundant lives. But **TRUST AND OBEDIENCE ARE THE ONLY WAYS TO ACCESS THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS.**

III. HOLY LIVING (VS 54-57)

People Who Have Truly Experienced God's Freedom Should Do Everything in Their Power to Remain Free.

Again the main theme of the entire book of Leviticus surfaces: holy living. **PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRULY EXPERIENCED GOD'S FREEDOM SHOULD DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO REMAIN FREE.**

These two verses summarize chapters 13-14. These commands are given by God. They are meant to be obeyed.

A. Grateful For God's Wholeness

First of all, we should be grateful for God's wholeness. We are all broken and damaged people. God can smell the least little scent of pride. I know there are many proud people in our society. And I'm pretty sure there is a great deal of pride in the church. The only way to receive real salvation is to admit that we are broken, sinful, hopeless, and rotten through and through. Unless we come to the point of realizing how horrible and broken we are, we can never receive the wholeness Jesus offers.

The reason most of us never get to the point of the joy, healing, and wholeness that Jesus offers, is that we don't think that we are really that bad. I don't want to force Jesus to take everything away from me before I realize how sinful and pathetic I am. I want to be thankful that He has healed me and made me whole.

B. A Commitment To God's Holiness

Secondly, if we were really thankful, we would be living lives committed to God's holiness. I'm sure that a Hebrew that went through being quarantined outside the camp for a long period of time, then healed, and once again brought back into the community, would be very careful never to sin again. That person would never want to do anything again that would cause him to have to go into exile again. We have been set free from the bondage of sin, this world, Satan and death. And yet, if we look at our lives, it's as if we can't wait to run back to sin and the lusts of this world.

You would think that **PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRULY EXPERIENCED GOD'S FREEDOM SHOULD DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO REMAIN FREE.**

I know that I have not yet arrived, but I also know that I'm getting better and that I have a real desire to please God through holy living. I do realize that all of life, the good things and the bad things are all gifts from God meant to make the man He wants me to be. I have come to realize that **ONLY JESUS CAN SET US FREE FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN AND ALL ITS EFFECTS.**

These days, I'm learning to embrace all of life. Someone sent me this email shortly after 9-11. It's kind of a way to check where we are:

"Next time your morning seems to be going wrong and the kids are slow getting dressed and you can't seem to find the car keys and you hit every traffic light, don't get mad or frustrated; praise God instead, because God is at work watching over you.

After September 11, I happened to call a man on business that I didn't know and haven't nor will probably ever talk to again. But on this particular day, he felt like talking. He was the head of security for a company that had invited the remaining members of another company who had been decimated by the attack on the Twin Towers to share their office space.

With his voice full of awe he told me stories of why these people were alive and their counterparts no longer were. In the end, all the stories were just about little things that happen to us.

You might know the head of the company got in late that day because his son started kindergarten.

Another fellow was alive because it was his turn to bring doughnuts. There were other stories that I hope and pray will someday be gathered and put in a book.

The one that struck me was the man who put on a new pair of shoes that morning, took the various means to get to work but before he got there, he developed a blister on his foot. He stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-Aid. That is why he is alive today.

Now when I am stuck in traffic, miss an elevator, turn back to answer a ringing telephone ... all the little things that annoy me ... I think to myself, this is exactly where God wants me to be at this very moment.

May God continue to bless you with all those annoying little things."

I can't speak for anyone else, but I really want to embrace life as a gift from God. And in response to the freedom He has given to me in Christ, I want to dedicate myself to holy living.