

"How Much More!"

Numbers 19

Our passage this morning initially strikes us as odd and disconnected to our lives today, 3400 or so years removed from this society. And yet, there is a small group of people today, obsessed with this passage for all the wrong reasons, which we'll talk about later. But as I prefaced last week's message we always need to remind ourselves whenever we come across Scriptures that are challenging or initially seem unrelatable we need to read 2 Tim. 3:15-17:

2 Tim. 3:15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Num. 19 has the ability to make people wise for salvation, if they need to be saved and it will be seen to be useful for us in explaining the gospel to others and it will also equip us to serve God who is so amazing in how He orchestrates all of this in a way we can understand. So let's pray for these very things:

This chapter is all about how does one stays 'clean' which gives you access to God's presence – when you come in contact with the deceased, which makes you 'unclean'. Remember, being clean and unclean does not mean you have sinned, it means you have become ceremonially impure that prevents you from having access to a holy and pure God. Diseases, wounds and death are all reminders that we live in a fallen world, that these are all consequences of sin's presence in the world and serve as reminders that this is not what God intended, however, And yet, He provides ways for impure or unclean people to still have access to Him.

The sacrifice of the red heifer was to purify one from the uncleanness that contact with death brings. Death exists because sin entered the world. So this sacrifice reminds everyone that

God Provides a Sacrifice that Makes Access to Him Possible in Spite of Death's Consequences **(19:1-10)**

Before we get any further, we know this passage is an illustration of the sacrifice of Jesus, so let's see how the author of Hebrews connects the two so we can see how this will all connect. In Hebrews 9-10 the author shows us how the sacrificial system was a primer for the sacrifice of Jesus. The sacrificial system illustrated God's perfect plan and sacrifice in Jesus. We read in Hebrews 9:11-14,

¹¹ When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

So, now we can see the connections more clearly to Jesus.

The sacrifice had to be 'perfect' (vv.1-2; Heb. 9:14)

It had to be a heifer, a female cow that had not given birth yet nor had not been used for labour. Because, giving birth or working under a yoke would have resulted in some kind of injury. So it had to be red (which is the colour of blood) and it had to have no visible injuries or imperfections. And we just read Heb. 9:14 which said Jesus offered Himself unblemished to God; meaning Jesus was sinless and had to go through a sinless, heavenly tabernacle [aka God's presence] for us.

The sacrifice had to be done outside (vv.3-8; Heb. 13:11-12)

Why outside the camp? So you can get access back into the camp where the presence of God was. Aaron's son Eliezer took the blood from the heifer and sprinkled it toward the Tent of Meeting, where God's presence dwelt, satisfying God through the shedding of blood.

Heb. 13:11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. ¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Here, the blood itself was also sacrificed. With all other sacrifices the blood is poured out, but in this one the blood is sacrificed with everything else. Once this is done the priest and the one who burns the sacrifice can wash and enter the camp, but they remain unclean until evening. But they now can enter where God's presence dwelt. The purpose of the offering is to

Applying the sacrifice cancels the penalty that sin causes (vv.9-10)

The ashes are gathered by a non-Levite, that were burned with cedar, hyssop and a scarlet wool (more symbols of red/blood?) and placed in a clean container and stored outside the camp for when it is needed for the sprinkling ritual, explained in vv.11-22. Mixed with 'living' water, this provides purification from sin – not specific sins one commits, but the consequences of being in contact with death, which comes because sin entered the world. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). All have sinned and fell short of God's presence (3:23). Death is the penalty of sin. The proof that we all sin is seen in that we are all aging. None of us can have access to God if we do not obey God's Word about how to have access to Him. The only way to have access to God is to believe the sacrifice He provided for us cancels the penalty of sin and makes us 'pure' before God in His eyes.

Heb. 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Heb. 9:23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence

Jesus' sacrifice cancels the penalty of sin which is death – eternal separation from God. If we believe in Him and accept His sacrifice is the only way we can have access to God, then our sins are forgiven and cancelled and we now have a relationship with God.

2:14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Perhaps you're thinking, 'How often does this actually happen?' This is where the context of the book comes into play. There's been a number of deaths recently. The 10 spies. Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families. The 250 rebellious leaders. And then the 14,700 people in a plague after Korah's rebellion. And, when the spies convinced the people not to go into the land, God announced that every male 20 years and older (who would have gone in to do battle in the land) would now die out over the next 39 years before Israel could enter the land. If we go back to the census in Num. 1, we read that there were 603,550 men 20+. If we count 39 years at 360 days per year dividing that by 603,550 we get on average 43 people dying per day. So that means everyday there a bunch of people who will have contact with the deceased who will become unclean and need this ritual to come into God's presence again. So the ritual reminds God's people

God Wants Us to Regularly Receive Cleansing When it is Needed (19:11-22)

¹¹ "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days. ¹² He must purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean. ¹³ Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the Lord's tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel. Because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean; his uncleanness remains on him.

God points out that there are no other options.

There is no other way to receive cleansing (vv.11-13)

If the Israelite refused to be cleansed after coming in contact with the dead, they lost access to God. They must receive God's cleansing so the relationship is restored and they can come back into the camp and worship at the Tabernacle. Otherwise they are cut off. There's a lot of debate about 'what cut off' meant. Sometimes it sounded very severe, possibly even having their life cut off. Usually the cutting off was a temporal loss of access to God and the community. And that sounds like the case here.

As an illustration of the consequences of our sins, when we sin and know it but don't deal with it, our relationship with people and with God is damaged until we seek to repair it. The psalmist pointed this out clearly in Ps. 66

¹⁶ Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. ¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. ¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; ¹⁹ but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.

Isaiah said to Israel in Is. 59:1-2

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

When we, who are in a covenant relationship with God, sin, and don't seek God's cleansing, we damage our relationship with Him so that our prayers go unheeded. Like the child who refuses to correct their behaviour or apologize to a sibling or a parent yet makes a request for something, they are told 'No, not until you apologize or do whatever it is they were supposed to do.' And God works that way too. He wants to forgive us and restore that relationship but we must do what He says first to repent.

James 4:8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Here in Num. 19 we see this principle laid out. This is the way God says to be restored so fellowship with God can continue.

In vv.14-22 we anticipate a question, 'What about this situation or that situation?' which God addresses. Whether you come in contact with the deceased inside (14-15) or outside (16-20), then followed by an overall summary at the end (21-22). If someone dies inside your tent then everything in the tent – people, furnishings or open containers – is affected and is unclean, and all needed to be sprinkled clean. And v.17 deals with the situation for coming across a deceased person outside. Only if you touch them or a grave are you considered unclean.

The only additional information we get here is that the person was unclean for a week and needed to be cleansed on the 3rd day and the 7th days. We're not told why but that was what you had to do. The other interesting thing was the water used to mix the ashes with and to be "fresh" water (NIV, v.19) or literally 'living/running' water. It had to be from a stream. And that imagery reminds the reader is that

Restoration is always available (vv.14-22)

Ponds, wells or puddles contain stagnant water – they can dry up. But a stream or a river is moving. It doesn't run out. Its always available. That's the point God made through Jeremiah to Israel in Jer. 2:13

2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

God is a living God, unlike the dead gods so many people falsely worship. They can't do anything for you. They can't solve the death problem, because they are dead and therefore powerless to deal with death. God is the living God and sent His perfect sinless Son who died in our place. He alone conquered death and now frees us from death's power and grants us access to His Father now, in worship, prayer and fellowship and then in eternity forever. Jesus referred to himself as living water to the Samaritan woman in John 4.

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” ¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

The red heifer was a unique sacrifice, where all of it (blood included) was offered to God and whose ashes when mixed with living water cleansed the one who believed by faith that when they were sprinkled by this mixture, they were cleansed from the curse of death and brought into a right relationship with God. Again the author of Hebrews puts this altogether for us through Jesus’ shed blood.

10:1 *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ... He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Many Jewish people today reject Jesus as the way to God. Some of them are working hard to restore the sacrificial system. In Jerusalem there is a place called The Temple Institute where orthodox Jews are making priests’ clothes, musical instruments and working on making the furniture for the Holy Place. They believe none of this can be started until they find the perfect red heifer. They wrongly believe that this red heifer cannot have more than 2 non-red hairs side by side on their body. So they are still looking for it. They believe many other things that the Bible does not teach on the red heifer ritual that must be performed exactly. But this is a work-based effort on man’s part to try and get to God when God has already said how to get to Him. The author of Hebrews (and many other passages) shows us these were a shadow to prepare us for Jesus, whom they have rejected as their Saviour.

The red heifer ritual was a reminder to God’s people that the curse of death separates from God. It started in the Garden of Eden and continues today that all people die and must deal with their sin problem, which brings about death. Putting our trust in Jesus as the only way to be cleansed from our sins and right with God won’t guarantee we won’t physically die (outside of the rapture) but it does guarantee we won’t suffer the second eternal death, ultimate separation from God.

For the believer in Jesus, we still sin and we still need correction and restoration with God when our sins disrupt our fellowship with Him. But He wants us to be restored. He’s the God of the living not the dead. Let’s practise regularly what the author of Hebrews told us to do now that we are in Christ:

10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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