

The Red Carpet Life. Leviticus 11 (12-15)

The Academy Awards is Super Sunday for the entertainment industry. Over one billion viewers tuned in to watch the King's Speech win the prize this year. Thousands of carefully chosen people were invited to walk the red carpet to attend the Oscar presentations in the Kodak Theater in Hollywood. To be a red carpet person means you're special. Do you know what makes someone a red carpet person? If you believe the media, what makes a red carpet person is the clothes they wear, the jewelry they adorn, the diets and exercise programs that keep them slim, the creams and tucks that keep them beautiful, their industry wealth, their Oscar friends and the charities they support. Red carpet people are separated from the rest of us by a high fence and a battalion of security people and carded paparazzi. They do not want their star power to be tainted by the ceremonially unclean.

You are what you eat, you are what you wear, you are your good looks we are told. Food, clothes and good looks helps you understand and define your red carpet status. Just ask a Linsey Lohan who would do most anything to maintain it.

It is the same for ordinary people like you and me. Adriana and I have been on the GI diet for a while. We want to be GI people, trim and healthy. We are what we eat. The GI manual has some strong words for their followers. All vegetables: good – green light, most fruits: good – green light. But when it comes to a Big Mac and fries. The word is DON'T. DON'T even think about it – red light – stop immediately or you will get some severe consequences. All sugar and fat and white flour are unclean, detestable, abominable. Even seeing them should stir up gut revulsion. Everything unclean must be expelled from the pantry of GI people.

You are what you eat. What you eat defines who you are. What you eat even shows who and what you worship. That was and continues to be the truth for the people of God. God has called us to be holy as he is holy. That is the theme that pervades the book of Leviticus – our worship manual. To worship a holy God, to enter the presence and enjoy all the blessings of a holy God, to live in a relationship with a holy God, the God of all glory and power, you need to walk on that red carpet of holiness as individuals and as a nation. Be Holy, as I the Lord your God am holy. (Leviticus 11:44 19:2 20:26)

To live in a meaningful and real relationship with God requires holiness on our part. And that is the burden of the book of Leviticus. Helping the people of God understand and live what it means to walk on that red carpet of holiness. Helping the people of God understand and live what it means to be holy as God is holy?

So what does it mean to be holy? Some people think to be holy means to make a valiant effort and to gain some success at reaching a certain moral standard or set of behaviors. Some people think being holy is increasing your ability to keep God's laws, increasing

your ability to do spiritual things and to think spiritual thoughts. To progress in being good. This is a misunderstanding of the bible. Holiness is not moral purity or even religious or spiritual excellence. Holiness is not becoming a red carpet moral super star that everyone admires and is in the final four balloting for the few holiness awards.

Listen to what God says to his people in Lev 20: 25 & 26. “ Do not defile yourselves with anything which I, the Lord, have set apart as unclean for you. You are to be holy to me because I the Lord, am holy, and have set you apart from the nations to be my own.”

To be holy means to be set apart, to be protected by a high fence, to be singled out, to be chosen to be wholly different from others, to be God’s own. This is not something we do or we accomplish. Seven times in chapters 20 – 22 (which is all about living the red carpet life) God says to his people I am the Lord who makes you holy. I make you holy.

Listen also to what God says to his people in chapter 18: 3-5. “I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt (DON’T EGYPT), where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan (DON’T CANAAN) where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must live by my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. I make you holy, I define what holiness is.

Basically what God is saying to his people, I want you to do everything in a way that reminds you and confirms in you and shows in you that you belong to me and are set apart, chosen for my purposes. You are my servants and my people. In Exodus 19 God came down to speak this message to his people in person. God said to them: As a mother eagle I came to you in Egypt, I rescued you and carried you on my wings and brought you to myself. Out of all the nations of the world I chose you to be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine you will be for me a people of priests a holy nation - doing the work I prepared in advance for you to do” I chose to make you holy. I set you apart.

Earlier in the service we sang our Lenten Litany song that captures the heart of worship. Purify my heart. Let me be as gold and precious silver. Purify my heart. Let me be as gold, pure gold. Refiner’s fire, God of the atoning sacrifices, set me apart for You Lord. Set apart for you, my master, ready to do your will. We are set apart as God’s people to do God’s will and to do God’s work. This song captures the essence of what it means to be holy. There is one problem with this song, however. You may have noticed that we changed one of the words from the original. The original song suggested that we choose to be holy. Set apart for you Lord, I choose to be holy. It is God who makes us holy. It is God who sanctifies us. As we learned in the previous weeks, through the God designed sacrifices God makes us holy. The God designed liturgies and the God ordained priests God forgives, God atones, God consecrates, God purifies. Through the God design pleasing aroma offerings God is pleased and we show we are his treasured possession.

We are what we eat, we are what we wear, we are our good looks. That is the red carpet life. So the people of Egypt cook a young goat in its mother milk to attain a higher level of credit with the gods of Egypt: We as holy people, as God's people we don't do that.

So the people of Canaan eat the meat of pigs sacrificed to their gods: we as holy people, as God's people, we don't do that.

So the people of Canaan shave their heads and tattoo their skin to show their devotion to and special status with their gods: We as set apart people, as people of the Lord, we don't do that.

As people of God we don't eat birds that prey on and eat the blood of others. Blood is something God uses to make us clean. Blood is holy.

And so to show that we are God's people, chosen to do God's work we eat only those animals that have a split hoof and chew the cud. We only eat fish with fins and scales, we only eat birds that eat grain. We do not want to disqualify ourselves from that holy nation and that holy mission God called us to. We are holy.

Many people have used what they eat, what they drink, what they wear and what they look like to insure their walk on the red carpet of holiness. In Jesus day many people thought they were holy because they were circumcised on the eighth day, because they didn't eat pork, because they followed the laws of Moses perfectly, because they kept away from women, they didn't associate with foreigners, and kept themselves clean according to all the commands of God in Leviticus. The problem is we do not choose to be holy, or make ourselves holy. We are made holy by God.

Jesus said in Mark 7:19 Are you so dull? Don't you see that nothing that enters you or touches you can make you unclean and unholy. What comes out of you; its what you do that shows you to be holy on the inside already. Jesus touched lepers, and he touched women who were having their periods, he touched dead people, he ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. When Jesus hung on the cross his last words according to the gospel of John were. "It is finished." This system of thinking that you can make yourself holy, this system of dressing yourself up, and eating certain foods and following certain traditions ended once and for all on the cross.

This system of classifying everything as clean and unclean was never designed to make us holy. Not once does it say in chapters 11-15 that these human actions make you holy. Circumcision, eating meat from cud chewing split hoof animals, were just outward signs that the people of God were Holy, they were signs that reminded them that they set apart, they were chosen to be God's priest. When you went to the bathroom, when you ate, when you had children, when you got sick, when you had sex, when you interacted with people who were not Jewish the message was always the same: You are holy. You are

chosen to be God's servants in the world to be agents who point to the great atoning sacrifice that only God can do.

When Jesus finished the atoning sacrifice on the cross for our sins a new set of holiness signs were instituted, a new red carpet kind of life started.

In Philippians 3 Paul says: as an Oscar winning Jew I used to put my confidence in what I looked like and what I ate, and who I interacted with, and my great accomplishments. I was a super star in righteousness based on the law. I was faultless in my red carpet life. I was Mr. Holiness.

But when I was baptized into Jesus all that jewelry of glory and those trophies of holiness I considered garbage - worthless. (8) "What is more I considered everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and to be found (and chosen) in him. Not having a righteousness and holiness of my own that comes through the law, but a holiness that comes from God based on faith."

We are what we eat, we are what we wear, we are our good look. But we are made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He is our atoning, our purifying, our sanctifying offering that makes us holy. We are holy. And to remind ourselves and to show ourselves and other that we are holy we eat Jesus, we cloth ourselves with Jesus and we pray to look like Jesus.

After the cross the red carpet life is no longer defined by the rules "Don't handle. Don't taste, Don't touch. We are no longer defined by our self imposed worship and false humility and harsh treatment of the body. Rather the red carpet life in Christ is shown in this, Paul says Colossians 3:12 "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, we cloth ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We let the peace of Christ, the peace with God through cross, define who we are and fill our hearts and be the source of our self esteem. Our red carpet life is defined by letting the word of dwell richly in us and helping other experience the same peace with God. We remind ourselves that we are holy by singing psalms, and hymns and songs from the spirit. Everything we do in word and in deed we do giving thanks to God for what God did in Jesus. So "be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy."