Leviticus 19vv1-18 - "Be holy"

As we come to the last in our series in Leviticus it will come as no surprise to those of us who have been coming each week to discover that our chapter for today, chapter 19, is once again about holiness… after all the whole of this book is about holiness.

And so I hope that we better understand something of God's holiness as we finish up this series… but as we do so, I want to ask you if holiness excites you… that is to say, *"Are you excited, driven, motivated to live a holy life yourself?!"*

In his excellent book, Hole in our Holiness, the author Kevin DeYoung begins by asking this very question.

He likens his desire to live a holy life, to his desire to go camping… in other words, whilst he can see how camping may be an attractive holiday idea for some… it's not for him, he cannot see the point.

I remember when I was first challenged by this and came to the conclusion that I think of holiness a bit like cricket.

Now I guess we are all aware that the English have invented many excellent things… including the telescope, toothbrush and the tin can… and many excellent sports… including football and rugby, and table tennis and darts

but sadly we also invented cricket… a game which involves standing around in a field for 5 days only for the result to be a draw… unless of course it rains, in which case, they stop playing… and call it a draw!

… I can think of holiness like cricket… it's something for other people… with lots of obscure rules and certainly not something to get excited about!

But here's the thing… I was failing to understand what holiness was really all about… thinking it was just a list of rules for those who were interested in that sort of thing.

But as I hope we will see this morning, it is far from being obscure, or for that matter, optional… rather, for the Christian believer it is exciting and essential

A clear command to all: "Be holy, because I the LORD your God, am holy"

I want to begin by looking at the beginning, and the end of this chapter…

Because for all the instructions that are in this chapter… and there are a lot BTW… over 50!… we must begin by thinking about who is speaking here

… this chapter is bookended, topped and tailed, bracketed… by reminders of who God is!

vv1-2 are pretty clear aren't they?…

Moses is to make sure ***everyone*** is gathered, so that they **all** can be told…

"You shall be holy for I the LORD your God, am holy"

and then v36-37…

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD."

This isn't actually the first time this is recorded in Leviticus… Cf Lev 11v45

and the point is this… being rescued by the holy God demands a response…

demands holiness…

which as we will see, means obedience to his commands.

1. **Being holy is in response to the LORD's rescue**

We are constantly reminded who is speaking, here in this chapter…

… I am ***the LORD***…(mentioned 8 times verses 12, 14, 16, 18, 28, 30, 32, 37))

that the one speaking is the LORD ***their*** God*… (Mentioned 7 times 3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 33, 36)*

the **LORD** (v36)… who has ***rescued*** them

15 times!! we are reminded that it is the LORD speaking

This means that these instructions are in a very different category to any other rules or regulations we might come across elsewhere in life

Before we moved to Switzerland, we received our tenancy agreement… all 14 pages of it… which were, if i'm honest, quite hard work to sit down and read, not least because they were in French

but i read them because I had to… because unless I signed them, I wouldn't be allowed in

and the danger is that i come across a list of instructions in the bible, and think they are like that… but they are not…

God is not saying, be holy, ***otherwise***… I **will not** let you into heaven, I will not rescue you

… only if you act holy enough, will I save you

NO

He is saying, I **have** rescued you… now as my rescued people, because I am your God and you are my people… be holy as I am holy

this is why chapter 19 here, is chapter 19, and not chapter 1!

And it's why all those other chapters are before it too

because all those chapters, as we have already seen these past few weeks, are about how unholy people, sinful people like you and I can be forgiven… not thru what we try and do..

"You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."

… "The only thing we contribute to our forgiveness is the sin that needs forgiving"

but thru the shed blood of another… thru the provision of a substitutionary sacrifice

we cannot make ourselves holy - but God can… and does… thru providing the sacrificial system… which ultimately points us to Jesus Christ our perfect sacrifice

The result of which, is that we can come before the holy God, on the basis of what Jesus has done, not in fear, but as his fully forgiven children… because of Jesus… we can call God, "our Father"

So here then is the first reason **why** the Israelites are to seek to live holy lives… its because the LORD, **their** LORD, the one who loves them and has rescued them and has made them holy… now calls them to live holy lives, in ***response*** to what he has done for them

they are rescued for a reason - to be holy

But there is a 2nd reason too…

2. Being holy is a reflection of the LORD who rescues

These verses not only tell us what God says, but also teach us what He is like

… God's instructions reflect His values

… instructions on how to be holy… reflect the God who is holy

So being holy is not about being weird just for the sake of it… its about being like God

what we have here then, is not just a list of regulations… but a revelation of what God himself is like!!

Now up to this point in Leviticus… being holy has referred to things that are ritually pure or clean, whether that be people, places or objects… holy thing are things "set apart" for use in the tabernacle

However, what we see here, is holiness refers to a moral quality… that is to say the Lord's moral purity, perfection… and it is this, that the Israelites have been "set apart" to embody in His world

And so whilst we **cannot** make ourselves holy… only God can do that

… we can and are, to seek to reflect God's holiness in the way we live

"Holiness is, in the deepest sense, a definition of God's nature as he expects to find it reflected in his children"

But why?… to what end?

… why if already holy in God's sight, are they to live holy lives in the sight of everyone else

well precisely for that reason… so that everyone else sees how they are living, and so sees something of the holiness of the God who rescued them

… by their holy living, they are to demonstrate His holy character to all who watch

God makes us holy… and then by his Spirit enables us to be holy

It's worth us remembering at this point, that this book of Leviticus was first spoken to the Israelites when they were in the wilderness.. having been rescued from slavery in Egypt… and are on their way to Canaan, God's promised land

…and back in the book of Exodus, following their rescue from Egypt… God says these words to them… Exodus 19vv4-6

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

It's a great summary of what God has rescued them **from**… slavery in Egypt…

but also what God has saved them **for**… so that they might demonstrate his holiness to the nations around them

they have not only been saved **from** slavery in Egypt, but also saved **for** holiness

and it is because of this that God gives them his laws… his instructions… to guide the Israelites and enable them to carry out their mission of reflecting his character in the world, and spreading his kingdom of blessing in all the earth.

It's why marriage is often used in the bible as a picture of this covenant relationship between God and His people

when I married Zannah, my status changed

but with that comes an expectation that I will live differently, that i will live as her husband, rather than as a single man

it would be strange for me as a married man to still live as though I was single

Similarly, for Gods rescued people, when Gods rescues them, their status changes and there comes with that an expectation that they will live differently

Now before we write this off as being written 3500 years ago to the Israelites and therefore of little relevance to the Christian believer today, we need to remember what the apostle Peter writes in his 1st letter… chapter 1, verse 15-16…

but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

So the call for God's rescued people to live holy lives still stands!

and as Peter goes on to say in chapter 2vv9-10… the Christian believer is

"*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

… So for the Christian then… Jesus has not simply saved us **from** something (the penalty of our sin), he also calls us **to** something…

He calls us to respond to his saving grace in every aspect of our lives; he call us to be that "kingdom of priests and holy nation."

Its why the apostle Paul calls the christian believer "Christ's ambassador"… just as a political ambassador represents his King or country in a foreign land… so the Christian represents his King

That being said,

let's now consider what being holy ***looks like*** here in Leviticus

… which is what all these middle verses are about

Now as Martin said last week, we need to take care in how directly we apply Leviticus to the New Testament believer

For as mentioned several times in our passage, the Israelites ***were*** in Egypt… they are **currently** in the wilderness, and one day ***will be*** in the promised land, Canaan… and **Jesus…** is ***yet to come*** to earth, die and rise again

… as such, their context is very different to ours

This mean that the ceremonial stuff… the temple stuff… the sacrificial stuff no longer applies because it has all been fulfilled in Jesus

… so we no longer bring animal sacrifices to the temple… nevertheless, the principle of repenting from sinful actions and seeking God's forgiveness thru THE sacrifice, Jesus Christ, does still apply

similarly, with the civil stuff, the laws of the land stuff… we are not on our way to Canaan where we will set up a judicial system according to God's instructions

… Christians now live scattered all over the world under many different forms of government…

and so as Christians we are not to take the law into our own hands…

So whilst God's moral laws, such as do not steal (19v11) still apply, the christian is not the means by which punishment is brought to bear… our government has that responsibility, under God, who is still the final judge and arbiter

What this means is that if we are Christians here today, we can still learn from what is written here, appreciate it, be helped by it,

And even though we are not obligated to the national laws of Israel, the principles that lie behind them are still very instructive for us

For as we will see, holiness is deeply practical… it impacts every area of our lives… and ultimately it is seen in love for God and for others

3. **Being holy involves loving God and loving others, each and every day**

I realise I have spent a long time on thats first point but it is so very important, because otherwise we see these instructions as either of no relevance to us at all… or the actual means of salvation

neither of which they are

The Scottish minister and writer Sinclair Ferguson, i think uses a helpful illustration to encourage us to get the balance right…

"Commandments are the railroad tracks on which the life empowered by the love of God poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit runs. Love empowers the engine; law guides the direction."

without love for God, the train goes nowhere

without instruction from God, the train does not know where to go

So we mustn't think that love and law are mutually exclusive

After all, Jesus himself held law and love together when he was asked which was the greatest commandment- he replied… love God and love neighbour, which is actually great summary of what we have in this chapter!

which is good, because as I mentioned earlier, I think there are over 50 instructions contained in these verses, which means that with the time we have left I would have to cover 2 or 3 every minute - so i'm not going to do that!!

but in the time we do have, we will consider the verses by asking 2 simple questions…

When are we to be holy?

and

What does being holy actually involve?

When?

each and every day… in each and every area of our lives!

I can't help but be struck as I read thru these verses, by the fact that every area of life is covered…

it covers the church and the home and your neighbours and your workplace and your wardrobe

I think the point is pretty clear…

seeking to be a holy and distinct people, is to impact every area of our lives.

this is why so many different situations are mentioned

It's not merely what happens in this building on Sunday mornings, but also what happens in your home on Monday evening after a long, hard, difficult day of work.

Or on Tuesday afternoon when the kids have been miserable all day.

It's what happens at your work on Wednesday when your boss is being less than reasonable,

and on Thursday when you go to the supermarket or sports club

It's what happens on Friday night after your children go to bed. And it's what happens during your day off on a Saturday afternoon

There is to be no ***one minute of any day*** when we are not seeking to reflect the LORD

when we are not seeking to be holy in every part of life...

"Lord of all, or not at all"… there is no half-way holiness

... And this is all for the purpose, so that when they get into the promised land - they will live distinctly different lives from the people around them

... they will be living, **AND** *be seen to be* living as a holy nation

In their actions they will be seen to be "*for what God is for, and against what God is against*"

They will not only ***say*** that they follow the true and living God - they will show it, in how they live

Their lives will match their words

Which brings me to that final question… **what** will this actually look like… ???

well again, i think the main point is pretty clear

… holiness is not some mysterious, intangible or subjective thing

… it is practical… deeply practical and it shows it self in loving God and loving others

it begins with our love for God… and this is worked out in our love for our neighbour…

being holy, is practically worked out in loving others

Which means you're not being holy when you are… sat on a cushion, in a candle lit room, in a monastery, in the middle of nowhere

but when…

so v9… generosity

v11-12… honesty

v13-14… compassion

v15 we wont show favouritism

v16 - we won't slander people…

v18 - love our neighbour.. which v34 includes those unlike us

CT Studd, a well-known English cricketer, was later converted to Christianity, but speaking about a time before his conversion he said this...

"Before that time, I thought that religion was a Sunday thing, like one's Sunday clothes, to be put away on Monday morning."

In other words he thought being a Christian was a hobby for the weekend!…

But then he continues…

We boys went to church regularly, but, although we had a kind of religion, it didn't amount to much.…We were always sorry to have Sunday come [since it] was the dullest day of the whole week.…Then…[I met] a real live 'play-the-game Christian.' It was my own father.

Well brothers and sisters, we are called by the LORD our God, to be those 'play-the-game" Christians... Living out our faith, living holy lives… each and every day of the week

There is to be no sacred:secular divide

No being holy on a Sunday... but living how i like Monday through Friday

No 'Sunday only' holiness! - **but rather** Monday through Sunday outworking of our relationship with the LORD - the LORD who rescues - our Father in heaven who calls us to be holy all day, every day

We are saved by God's grace - for holy living… obedience to his instructions

Which means that when we get this wrong - which we will

We do not despair

Yes there are consequences to our sin - justice does matter to God, our failure to treat God and others as we should, does matter to God - there are consequences - but wonderfully Jesus faced those consequences in our place on the cross

He bore our sins

He bore our inability to keep any of these laws properly

... So that we can be forgiven

... So that we can repent - pick ourselves up - and try again

... Not because our salvation depends on it

… But because we have been saved... And as God's saved people, as his rescued people, we are called to live holy lives on this earth, until our LORD calls us home

Leviticus..

it teaches us that God is holy

and that He provides the sacrifice to make unholy people like you and I, holy

… and then he calls us to live out what we already are

… be holy, because I the LORD your God, am holy