

The Red Heifer

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(Transcript of Tape)

Please turn to Numbers, Chapter 19. I trust that today as we consider this important chapter having to do with the red heifer, you will see it as the provision that God made for the people of the congregation that is parallel to and a counterpart of the provision for the priesthood made in the laver. Now I feel that the truth concerning the laver is an indispensable point in our progress into the full revelation of God's presence in our lives. It cannot be too strongly held and understood by us. We propose to deal with this subject.

Let us have two or three things clear at the outset. First, all matter of salvation is of God. Salvation is of the Lord. He has known our need and has provided fully for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you can understand, at this juncture, that God is on your side, that God is for you, that God's concern is for your well being, your joy and blessing, then you will have succeeded in casting off one of the chains that has held many Christians in defeat and in failure and kept them from blessings. Second, the god of the world, Satan, our arch enemy, seems to delight in deluding dear children of God in thinking that God is either indifferent to sin, unconcerned about it after they become Christians, or they think He is impossible to please. There is a tremendous weight and burden pressing upon Christians as they feel that He holds a standard they can't achieve. They are deluded into thinking that the Christian life is going to be one continuous series of spiritual disappointments until finally life ends and they are taken into His presence. Both of these concepts are incorrect. God is just as holy now as He was in the Old Testament. He hasn't changed in any way. He hates sin today as much as He did before the Lord Jesus died, and He must deal with it as He did before Christ died. There's no change in regard to God's attitude toward sin. But certainly if we rightly understand His grace manifest in the Lord Jesus, it is to enable us to live a joyful, fruitful, victorious Christian life.

Now, if God is holy, and He is, and He hates sin, and He does, and we are unable to walk the Christian life as He has prescribed, and we can't, then what are we going to do? What's the answer? The answer is two-fold. There are two problems. First, we must understand what to do in case we fail. Secondly, we must understand how to avail ourselves of His grace so we won't have to keep on failing.

Let us deal with the first problem. What did the Old Testament believer do when he discovered that he had displeased the One whose name is holy? He couldn't go into the court of the tabernacle to the laver. The priest could. You as a believer priest can, but the Israelite couldn't. Therefore God made provision to the people of the congregation in the red heifer. This is God's means of providing for the cleansing from that failure and disobedience and sin that comes into the heart of children of God after they have been born into His family.

However, we must make one other thing clear. A child of God wants to please his Father. God gave you a new heart when you came to Him in repentance and in faith. He not only pardoned your past but He gave you a new heart with a new purpose to please Him, to glorify Him, to obey Him. This is the new heart. It's the same tissue physically, but there's a new life, a new purpose, a new reason for being when you've been born of God. The purpose is that Jesus Christ be praised, that He be glorified, that He be exalted.

Now, if you are a counterfeit Christian, you have theology without God; you have the plan of salvation without the presence of the Savior, and you are looking for some way that you can insure yourself against being caught. You continue to go on in disobedience to the Lord. There is nothing for you here. The only person who has any part in what we are considering is the one who wants to please God and is concerned about what he should do when he fails.

This is what we find set forth in the red heifer. Now the ordinance is this: God commanded Moses that a heifer, a red heifer, the color of scarlet, which always symbolizes sacrifice, a clean animal, without spot or blemish upon which the yoke has never come, should be brought to the priest, taken outside the camp and be killed. There should be a pile of wood sufficient so that without adding wood the entire animal could be burned. Into this burning fire upon which the body of the heifer had been placed, the priest would cast small pieces of cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, throwing them into the midst of the fire. Then he would retire into camp, bathe and wash his clothes. He would be unclean until evening.

Another man, who is clean, after the fire had burned down and the ashes had cooled, would scrape the ashes together and put them into an urn for safe keeping. The ashes were stored in a convenient place outside the camp so that when the Israelites touched that which God had forbidden, did that which was contrary to His will, there would be means available whereby they could be restored to fellowship again.

It would be necessary for the person himself to recognize that he was unclean. He would have to judge himself. There were so many religious rules. Suppose an Israelite was walking in the field and stumbled on a dead body. Now if he had wished he could have turned around and pretended he hadn't been there. However, He was aware that God knew. Or in the field, he could not touch one slain by the sword, or step on a grave. (Numbers 19:11-22) There might be occasions when someone might expose him. The Israelite desired to be accepted not only by the brethren, but by God. Thus he had to judge himself. Confession. "Today, I touched a dead body, I stepped on a grave."

Then the Israelite would have to ask a clean person to help him. And it would be three days that he would remain unclean from the time he had requested help. Then he would be sprinkled with the ashes from the red heifer. On the seventh day he would bathe and wash his clothes to purify himself. If he refused to do as God had provided and prescribed, he was aware that God knew.

There was one way that this Israelite could be cut off from the congregation...ostracized...shunned. He could ignore the provision made and be denied fellowship.

This cutting off from the congregation wasn't just what the congregation did to the individual. God was involved. The Lord was concerned and so He had a way of affecting their lives and all that was dear and precious to them. Read Deuteronomy 28 which deals with the blessings of obedience and the serious penalties of disobedience.

There are five things that happen to us when we sin. First, fellowship with God is broken. Now, if you have never known fellowship with God, then you don't know when it is broken. You have to ask yourself the question, "When have I had fellowship with God? When was the last time God spoke to my heart? When was the last time the warmth of His presence engulfed my heart and I was beneath the warm sunshine of the Spirit's smile?" When you are walking in fellowship with Him there is a peace, there is a contentment, there is rest and joy, even in the midst of difficulties.

Fellowship doesn't necessarily mean constant talking. It's wonderful to see fellowship between a mother and her little daughter. The daughter can take care of her family of dolls and dishes on the floor in the corner of the kitchen, and the mother can take care of her family of children and dishes and duties. For thirty minutes no words are spoken. Words aren't necessary. Mother and child are having fellowship. There is no conversation, but warm fellowship exists because each understands the interest of the other.

Fellowship with God doesn't mean you are on your knees, that you are reading hymns or the Bible, or even particularly thinking about God. But you just know everything is right. You just know it is right!

And then when something not of God comes in, you know it is wrong. If you are in fellowship with Him you know when you have grieved Him. Now what do you do, wait for the next revival meeting in nine months so you can go forward on the third night and deal with it? Of course not. The time to deal with it is at the moment that you have grieved the Spirit of God. Deal with it immediately.

The second thing that happens when a child of God sins is that God doesn't use him. He's cut off from the congregation. Picture the Sunday School teacher who rides in the car with her husband and children after a tiff at breakfast. The parents argue all the way to the church over some petty thing while the children cower in the back seat wondering who's going to strike first.

When she arrives in the classroom, she solemnly bows her head and mumbles, "Now, dear Lord, bless the children, bless this lesson."

She's wasting her time, you know. The place where the blessing was lost was when the first word was spoken in the kitchen that morning when the family was eating breakfast. Instead of saying, "I'm sorry, honey. Forgive me," the husband and wife had blown the incident out of proportion, and it had poisoned the day. True, she is going through the motions of teaching a class of children, but the Lord is not in it. So it is with preachers, with everyone. God is very sensitive. He says, *Be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord* (Isaiah 52:11). God uses clean vessels, clean lives. The third thing that happens when a child of God sins is that his prayers go unanswered. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* (Psalm 66:18).

"Well, this isn't too important; we've got things pretty well under control now," you say. Just wait a little while. If you think that you can get by without needing to pray, just wait a minute. God loves you too much to let that kind of an attitude continue. You are going to find that very shortly you are in a place where you need prayer, very quickly. It is terribly important that we should be able to pray.

Now the fourth thing that happens when a child of God sins is that he is exposed to the ravaging attacks of Satan. The Bible says, *Give no place to the devil* (Ephesians 4:27). If you do, you know full well the devil is going to take it. The devil sends his hunting dogs up around the Christian's life. If we are walking in obedience to the Lord, there's a high board fence that surrounds us. *The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him* (Psalm 34:7). The devil's hunting dogs are sniffing around the fence of your life. When you allow sin to creep in, that beagle of the pit comes up and smells it. He sends up a baying which echoes down into the caverns of darkness. The prince of darkness dispatches a particular pack that's going to harm you. How do they come? They come into your business, into your body with sickness, into the family with dissension. The protective fence is broken. It's a terrible thing to give place to the devil because he is a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour.

Those of us who have lived in Africa know that the lion does not go roaring up and down the jungle hunting for prey. At the first roar every gazelle in the bush would scamper as fast as it could in the direction away from the sound. No. No. The lion doesn't roar until he's had lunch. Then he can boast of it.

If you think the devil is going about roaring trying to catch you, you're mistaken. He's subtly creeping in trying to get you to do anything that will grieve Him whose name is Holy, so that he can get a hold of you. Then he'll boast about it. But right now he is awfully quiet, subtle. Wait until he's got his teeth in you and listen to the roar that comes!

The fifth thing that happens when a child of God sins: he falls into the chastening hands of God. Dear Christian, if you don't stay away from sin because of the other four, if I had words eloquent enough to do it, I would like to prove to you that we had better stay away from sin because of the fifth reason. The Apostle Paul said, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31).

I have scars to prove it. I'm sure many of you have scars, as well. You see, God chastens every child, and He scourges every son.

"Oh," you say. "I know some people who are living in sin, and they seem to get by quite nicely. Nothing has happened to them.

Oh, but do you realize what's happened to them? God has taken a banner and spread it across the street in front of their house proclaiming that the people who live here and claims to be Mine, really aren't Mine at all. They have a spurious testimony, a counterfeit claim. God never touches the devil's children, never lays a finger on them. He knows this is all the heaven they are going to have and when they die, it will be hell forever. He is not going to cheat them out of the little thing for which they have sold their souls. God also knows that this is all the hell that His child is going to have, and it will be heaven forever. He is perfectly willing to discipline His children to get them ready for heaven.

Now let's go back for a moment to Number 19. What does this sacrifice, of which we read, mean? Oh, can't you see the beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ? He was without spot, and that was the first requirement. The red heifer must not have any blotches on it, no spots. This speaks of our Lord Jesus in His sinless purity. He is the only one in history of whom it was said, "Without sin." To this day there has never been a charge leveled against Him which stayed. Pilate said, This man has done no sin. I have betrayed innocent blood. There is no evil in Him. And God the Father said, *"...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17).

Notice, also, the red heifer should have had no yoke. Our Lord Jesus never had the yoke of sin. You've had it. You know how you have been yoked to habits, attitudes and traits to which you had no choosing and from which you find in yourself no loosening. You bore the yoke, a yoke of failure, of disobedience, of sin.

But there was no yoke on Christ. The only yoke He knew was that of total submission to the Father's will. *"...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me"* (John 5:30). Our Lord Jesus perfectly fulfills the requirements. He is the only One without spot, no blemish, upon which a yoke had never come.

But you see something else here. Our Lord Jesus is pictured not only as the red heifer, the sacrifice, but He is also pictured as the priest. He began as the victim; He went to the cross in our place. Our Lord Jesus died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. He was made to be sin for us, He who, *"knew no sin"* (II Corinthians 5:21). Into that fire where He died was cast the cedar wood of our iniquity and the hyssop of our rebellion and the scarlet of all of our crimes against the righteousness of God. He died for you and for me!

But it doesn't stop there. It isn't just that the Lord Jesus died. He lives again. And the testimony of the Word is *He is able to save unto the uttermost all time that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them* (Hebrews 7:25). He is not only the victim; he is also the priest. And He it is now who witnessed that sacrifice, and He it is who is equated with us. Therefore you have a high priest who is touched with the feelings of your infirmity. He knows you. He knows me. He has been tempted in all manner as we are, and yet without sin. He's known the pressure. He's known the test.

You say, "Oh, if He only knew my life." He knows your life. What is the problem in your life? You say that it's poverty. Well, Jesus had no place to lay His head, one garment that was given to Him, and bread that came only from the kindness of the people. When he left the carpenter's shop, he left all security behind.

"But," you say, "He's never know loneliness like mine. It's so lonely in this city. Don't you realize that out of loneliness I fail the Lord. Out of loneliness I sin."

Yes, I realize this. I recognize that probably a great proportion of the crimes that are committed in New York City are committed out of loneliness. But don't tell me my Lord didn't know loneliness. One night in the Garden of Gethsamene all His friends got up after they had been listening to Him speak. They said. "Well, time to go home and go to bed." They went off, two or three here, two or three there, to sleep. Jesus was left alone in the Garden!

I think that everyone who has a home in this city ought to realize that God wants to make that home a mission station for lonely hearts. I hope if you're going home to dinner after church you'll take somebody home with you. You know, it might be that you could save someone from a crime today just because you extended a hand of human love. Do you realize that? For as I speak and say our Lord knew loneliness, I do not for a moment condone the fact that we have often become so indifferent to the plight of others that we have closed our hearts to their need.

Thou seest thy brother has need and shut up thy bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in that man? (I John 3:17). Our Lord knew what it was to see His disciples dispersed to their homes with no one inviting Him. He wrapped Himself in His long robe and slept with a hard rock as a pillow, a long, lonely night. While his disciples slept, He wrestled and prayed alone. *"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46).

Listen, there is nothing that you will ever know that our Lord Jesus has not experienced for you. Never fear, He as priest made full provision by His death, went without the camp and died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

The priest put his finger into the blood as the red heifer was killed. Seven times he sprinkled it before the tabernacle, depicting the perfect presentation of the blood of God's eternal Son. This is the only place where God and the sinner can meet. Now the conscience of the sinner can rest in the fact that God has accepted the death of His Son. God has completely judged sin in His Son. You see yourself deserving death, repent of your sin and receive Christ. Then your sins are absolved by His blood. The blood is sprinkled once. Sin has been put away once. The blood of the Lord Jesus was offered for our sin once.

The red heifer was killed and burnt, the ashes tenderly and carefully gathered so that there might be a remembrance, a prototype, of Christ's death. When the Israelites encountered the urn containing the ashes of the red heifer, of what were they thinking? They remembered a sacrifice.

The purpose of the ashes was to provide for the removal of the defilement that is a part of our daily walk. God didn't isolate people inside the court of the tabernacle lest they should touch a dead bone or step on a grave. God loves you too much for that. He allows you to return to the source and snare of your temptation. Perhaps it's Wall Street or Times Square. The Lord Jesus isn't going to put you into a little box and ship you out to Seattle, so that you can't be in New York City. He may let you go to Seattle, but it is after He has dealt with you and shown you the provision of His grace to keep you when you walk through Times Square. He does not isolate His people. He transforms them so they don't want to step on the grave or touch the dead body. They want to be clean. They want to please Him.

Has God done that for you? Has God given you a passionate desire to please Him, a consuming longing to please Him? Do you truly want to please God? Scarlet speaks of your sins, your plight. Cedar and hyssop speak of your nature, what you've done, what you are. At the sacrifice of the red heifer the priest cast into the fire the scarlet of our sins. The cedar and hyssop of our nature were consumed there. *"I am crucified with Christ,"* said Paul (Gal. 2:20).

It's a very solemn thing to walk with God in such a world as ours. God knew your nature and God knew the possibility of your sin, even after you were forgiven and pardoned, and after you were "under the blood." God knew that as you walked down the path of life that He was going to need to deal with you. You see, God can cleanse from sin, but He can't condone sin. There is a difference, a tremendous difference.

Let me ask you, what are the bones in your past? What are the graves in your past? What are the dead bodies in your past? Is there self pity? Out of self pity do you do things which are wrong? Have you come to the place that you deal with self pity as a sin instead of a weakness, for sin it is.

Is the dead bone jealousy? Were you terribly jealous of people? Were you enraged that you were deprived and someone else honored.

Perhaps the dead bones of your past were immoral thoughts, questionable books, movies, TV, pornographic pictures. You kick them along in front of you as a school boy scuffs a rock all the way home. When you finally get home, you know you have grieved God.

Listen, you can identify those dead bones littering the path you have taken. You know where those dead bodies of grief and heartache are. And you know something else? The evidence that you have a new heart is that when you touch the bones your heart is grieved. You are burdened. I plead with you in the Name of Jesus Christ, the all sufficient One, that you recognize that the result of sin is immediate broken communion and separation. Conviction must follow and then confession and cleansing. That's what God wants. These steps can be simultaneous, but the three steps are there. Instantly recognize sin. Don't excuse it. Don't apologize for it. Don't cover it. Don't rationalize it. Deal with it as sin. Confess it as sin; forsake it. This is what the Spirit of God requires.

In the Old Testament, a farmer would come in from his field. He would go to his neighbor, who was clean, confess that he'd stepped on a grave while plowing. Confessing his uncleanness, he would request prayer. Listen, the Friend you have to Whom you go is the One who is the red heifer, and the One who is the priest. He's the Friend *"that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24). He is not only the sacrifice, not only the Priest, but He is your Friend. You can say, "Lord Jesus, today my heart was filled with bitterness. My mind was filled with uncleanness. I confess that it is sin. I hate sin." Then He brings you back to the ashes of remembrance of His death. Then you realize that *the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:9). But there isn't any cleansing until you go your Friend in confession, "Lord Jesus, I sinned." He's the sacrifice; He's the Priest, but He is also your Friend.

He has your name engraved on His nail-scarred hands. He holds His hands up to the Father and says, "Here, Father, is my friend who stepped on a grave, who touched a dead body, who kicked a bone, and sinned." Then follows the ashes mixed with the water, the sprinkling of cleansing, and restoration of glorious fellowship.

Let's bow in prayer. During the past week have you stepped on a grave? I did. This has been a week when God has brought me face to face to see a grave that I thought was buried, and I stepped on it. I went to my Friend and told Him that I had sinned. He brought me to that place of cleansing. How about you? Can you say today that you want to be clean? Are you prepared to deal with everything that grieves Him, judge it, forsake it, confess it and in brokenness experience cleansing and restoration to fellowship?

I'm going to give opportunity for any of you who wish to and need to come to the place where the ashes of the red heifer are. That's where you have remembrance of One Who died that you'd be not only saved from hell, but saved from sin.

Lord, out of love and tenderness draw us by any means necessary into the place Thou would have us be. Thou know our hearts. We ask Thee, Father, for Jesus, our Savior's sake, to breathe upon us until sin will appear exceedingly sinful. May we learn brokenness before the Lord. May we learn to remain broken. In brokenness we release His grace and life and power. We pray for revival. May we realize that revival will come on Thy terms when we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. We thank Thee for those who have met Thee in Thy reviving love, and whose hearts have felt a refreshing and have been drawn close to Thee. Include us all, Lord. Let none be omitted in the breaking of the bread.

Now may Thy grace, mercy and peace from Father, Son and Holy Spirit be and abide with us now and until Jesus comes again. Amen."

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