


# No Longer and Not Like

## Kicking It Off

What is the most lost you have ever been, back before the GPS on your phone could tell you where to turn?

## Read

Leviticus 17:10-12; 18:1-5 and Luke 22:19-20

## Summary

Leviticus 17 has one of the strangest rules in the Bible. Israel was never allowed to eat blood. Every time they cooked meat, the blood had to be drained out first. It sounds like an old health code, but the reason is right there in the text: the life is in the blood, and God had given that life for one purpose, to make atonement on the altar. So the blood belonged to God. Every meal, every time someone got dinner ready, the rule was a small reminder that life comes from Him and that He had made a way for sinful people to be made clean.

Then Jesus sits down at a Passover meal with men who had kept that rule their whole lives, lifts a cup, and says, drink this, all of you, this is my blood. You can imagine the room. It sounded like breaking the very law they had always kept. But Jesus was not throwing the law out. He was saying He is the life the law was protecting. The blood God gave on the altar is now given to us, and taking it means trusting Him. In John 6, believing in Jesus and feeding on Him carry the exact same promise.

Right after that, Leviticus 18 has God telling His people that they are no longer who they were in Egypt and they are not going to become like Canaan. Think of the Old Testament as a map, a really good one, where every direction pointed to the blood and to the Messiah. Now the One the map was pointing to is in the car with you. God promised to put His Spirit in His people and lead them Himself. So following Jesus is less about keeping score of who needs grace most and more about staying close to Him and going where He sends, including to the table with people you never would have invited.

## Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Israel could not eat blood because God had given its life for atonement, so even getting dinner ready carried a reminder of what God had provided (Leviticus 17:11). What ordinary part of your day could become a reminder of what God has given you?
3. When Jesus spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, many who heard it called it a hard saying and stopped following Him (John 6:60, 66). What has been the hardest thing for you to accept about following Jesus?
4. God told His people not to walk in the ways of Egypt behind them or Canaan ahead of them (Leviticus 18:3). Which pull is stronger for you right now, the patterns you grew up with or the culture around you?
5. God promised to put His Spirit within His people and cause them to walk in His ways (Ezekiel 36:27), more like a navigator riding along than a map left on the seat. Where do you sense God steering you right now that you have been slow to follow?
6. A faith run like a ledger says I needed Jesus one day this week while someone else needs Him every day. Whose need for grace have you been measuring against your own?

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

"When you have a dietary restrictive law, you aren't allowed to only think about it on Sundays. You're not allowed to only think about it on the Sabbath. You have to think about it every single day of the week, every meal of the day. Not even every meal: every preparation for every meal, you have to make sure you are aware that this animal had blood in it and you are not allowed to eat it. And this is where many people fall onto the law and say, who cares why, I'm just not allowed to do it. No, the why is everything. The blood is meant for the atoning work. The blood is meant to clean."

"Jesus saying, 'Drink of it, all of you,' is not the breaking of the law. This is Jesus pointing to His blood being the life. This is not us looking flippantly at Leviticus and saying God was mistaken, blood doesn't matter, we can do whatever we want. Yes, we don't have the same dietary restrictions, but how dare you say that blood doesn't matter? Of course blood matters. Our whole worship, our whole identity, is covered by the blood of Jesus."

"In many ways, the Old Testament is the map. There's nothing wrong with the map. The map is great. It is perfect. It is beautiful. And it explained to the people of God how to get to God, how to dwell with Him. But now that we have the Messiah, the map is not wrong. The map has pointed to the One you were trying to meet. And now the One you are trying to meet is in the car with you."

"As a pastor, I've made even my own faith too much about what I can do correctly. And it produces such an arrogant attitude, because it becomes, you know what, I've been really good, I only needed Jesus one day this week. And when that guy came into the church, he needs Jesus seven days a week, because he's so sinful. That lady who's divorced, she's eight days a week. It creates this economy that God never intended. I need Jesus every single day of my life. I need Him constantly."

Sermon Notes

***Leviticus 17:10-16***

*10 “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. 11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. 12 Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.*
*13 “Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. 14 For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off. 15 And every person who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening; then he shall be clean. 16 But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.”*

***Leviticus 18:1-5***

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. 3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. 4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.*

## Outline

1. Given, Not Taken - Leviticus 17:10-16
    a. Exodus is the story of salvation. Leviticus begins with the premise that God's people are saved and answers the question that comes next: now that you have been saved, how should you live?
    b. What is common cannot exist in the presence of what is holy, so God gave blood as the cleansing agent between the unclean and the holy. The blood does not represent life, it is life, and God gave it "for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls" (17:10-11).
    c. Israel did not manufacture the system as a guess at what might please God. It was given to them.
    d. So blood was forbidden as food, a law kept at every meal and every preparation for every meal rather than only on the Sabbath. The point was never better health. The why is everything: the blood was set apart for the atoning work.
    e. To a people who had just seen the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, the law gave every meal a reason to say, thank you for the blood.
2. Drink of It, All of You - Matthew 26:27-28; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:40, 54, 63; Romans 3:31; 1 Peter 1:18-19
    a. At the Passover table Jesus says to men who had never tasted blood, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:27-28). He does not speak in symbols. Eat My flesh, drink My blood.
    b. His words track Leviticus 17:11: given for you, poured out for you (Luke 22:19-20). He speaks with the authority of the God who gave the blood, because He is the atonement the law was protecting.
    c. This is not the breaking of the law. Blood still matters, our whole identity is covered by it, and faith upholds the law (Romans 3:31).
    d. Eating is believing: the same promise goes to everyone who looks on the Son and believes and to whoever feeds on His flesh and drinks His blood (John 6:40, 54). "It is the Spirit who gives life" (6:63). No wonder it was a hard saying.
    e. Repeated sacrifices never gave a lasting atonement. Repentance and humility are needed, and so is sacrifice, and God has given it on the cross, the precious blood of a lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:18-19).
    f. Like the two goats of Yom Kippur, He died and rose, and He is seated at the right hand of God because it is done.
3. Map and Navigator - Leviticus 18:1-5; Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 10:4-5; Deuteronomy 7:8
    a. "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt... and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan" (18:3). No longer in the bondage we grew up in, and not shaped by the culture around us.

b. The Old Testament is a perfect map, like the Thomas Guide I learned to drive with, and every direction pointed to the Messiah and to the blood.
c. God promised, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Ezekiel 36:27). The map has pointed to the One you were trying to meet, and now He is in the car with you. Going back to the map is still good, because it points to the Navigator.
d. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). You have been made clean, saved, and sanctified, and you are being sanctified, by what God is doing, so be intimate with Christ. Full stop.
e. A faith where I need Jesus one day a week and the divorced woman needs Him eight is an economy God never intended. I need Him every day, and the church is open to all, an invitation rather than condemnation.
f. God brought His people out "because the LORD loves you" (Deuteronomy 7:8), so we surrender and obey, going where He sends.

## Notes

I grew up in a church culture where the question was always whether you were saved. Are you saved? Are you sure? I remember thinking I might need to go up for the next altar call just to make certain. That is not the question the Old Testament is asking. Exodus is the story of salvation, God hearing His people cry out in slavery and bringing them out of the hand of Pharaoh. The Israelites at Sinai were not wondering whether they had been saved. They had walked out of Egypt. Their question was the one that comes next: now what? Leviticus answers it. It begins with the premise that you have been saved and explains how a saved people dwells with God, the way Adam and Eve once walked with Him in the garden. Exodus is salvation, and Leviticus, in many ways, is sanctification. Now that you have been saved, how should you live?

Over these weeks we have walked through the sacrificial system, the economy God set up so that the blood of an animal could atone for sin. What is common cannot exist in the presence of what is holy, so there has to be a mediator between the unclean and the clean, and God allowed blood to be that cleansing agent. Leviticus 17 explains why in very clear terms. God does not say that blood represents life. He says the blood is life. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (17:11). I am not making this up. Israel never manufactured the atoning system as a guess at what might please God. It was given to them, and God is the one who gave it.

That is why God wrote a dietary law into their statutes. Israel could not eat blood, and when they ate meat, the blood had to be drained out first. People hear that and assume it was about health, that following the Bible to the T is better for your body. That misses it. A food law cannot be kept only on the Sabbath. You keep it at every meal, and before that at every preparation for every meal. Every time an Israelite prepared meat, the law asked why, and the why is everything. The blood belonged on the altar rather than the table, set apart for the atoning work, the cleaning work, so that God could dwell with His people. Whenever we stop asking why and say "who cares, I'm just not allowed," we have turned the law into a list of rules, and the heart of it was always worship. These were people who had just seen the blood of the lamb on their doorposts in Egypt. The law gave every meal a reason to say, thank you for the blood, because the blood is life.

Then Jesus changes the game. At the Passover meal He takes a cup, gives thanks, and says to men who had never tasted blood in their lives, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28). Many would have called that blasphemy. Jesus does not soften it into a symbol. He does not say, drink what stands for My blood. He says, eat My flesh and drink My blood.

He is pointing to something deeper than the rule. Put Leviticus 17:11 next to Luke 22. God says, "I have given it for you on the altar." Jesus says, "This is my body, which is given for you," and "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20). The atoning system was a gift, and Jesus speaks in the same terms. People sometimes ask where Jesus claims to be God in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. I think this is one place. God said, here is blood given to you for atonement, so do not eat it. Jesus, speaking with God's own authority, says drink My blood, because He is the atoning work the law was protecting.

So drinking His blood keeps the law rather than breaking it. The law protected the sanctity of the blood, and we have not stopped believing that blood is holy. We are free to eat whatever we want, and still our whole worship, our whole identity, is covered by the blood of Jesus. How dare we say blood doesn't matter? "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31). The law is fulfilled in Christ, and we uphold it more, not less.

John 6 shows what kind of eating this is. Many Bibles title the section "the hard saying." Jesus makes the same promise twice: "Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (6:40), and "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (6:54). Eating is believing. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all" (6:63). Of course it was hard to hear. To people who could not eat the blood of an animal, it sounded ridiculous, like cannibalism, and against Scripture. I understand why well-meaning people called Him dangerous, a blasphemer, a madman.

The sacrifices had to be repeated over and over, so they never gave a lasting atonement. When the temple fell in AD 70 and the sacrifices stopped, the rabbis taught that God asks for repentance and humility. They are so close. Repentance and humility are needed, and you still need a sacrifice. God has presented one on the cross. Christ's flesh was broken and His blood was shed, the precious blood of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:18-19), and it covers us for all eternity. Like the two goats of Yom Kippur, He died on Good Friday and rose again as the living goat, so our sins are no longer on us. Our High Priest is not standing at His work. He is seated at the right hand of God, because it is done.

Leviticus 18 then speaks to the redeemed: "I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes" (18:2-3). This is close to the theme verse of the whole book. You are no longer Egyptian, and you are not to become like the land ahead. The same holds for us. We are no longer in the bondage we grew up in, and we are not to be shaped by the culture around us. We are

called to walk and dwell in God's presence, with Him at the center of the camp and the center of our lives.

I still carry some of that old culture. Part of me still asks whether I am really saved. I do believe I am, because I trust the blood of Jesus. The question I ask more often is what I am supposed to do now. For Israel the answer was to keep the commandments given through Moses, and the danger was keeping them so carefully that the why got lost.

I think of the Old Testament as a map. When I learned to drive, I had a Thomas Guide, a big book of street maps. I looked up a friend's street in the directory, found the cross-section, and kept track of north and south, because left and right are no help if you don't know which way you're facing. I drove stick, so I was shifting with the Thomas Guide open on the passenger seat, turning pages, sometimes pulling over to read it like a book. There was nothing wrong with that map. God gave a people just freed from prison a map and said, do these things and you will find Me. It was the most sacred map ever made, because it led to the Messiah, and every direction said the same thing: keep your eyes out for the blood.

Then Jesus came and said, I am what you have been waiting for. When He told them to drink His blood, He was showing them the map had been pointing at Him all along, not that the map was faulty. And God had promised more than a map: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezekiel 36:27). The map has pointed to the One you were trying to meet, and now the One you were trying to meet is in the car with you. The Holy Spirit is the Navigator, telling you how to love God and how to love others. Going back to the map is still good, because the map points to the goodness of the One who is navigating. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).

So we are no longer bound to the dietary laws, and our standing is not a matter of clean and unclean. You have been made clean in the blood of Jesus. You have been saved and sanctified, and you are being sanctified, by what God is doing rather than by your works. You do not need to keep 613 commandments, or be the model Christian, or have every duck in a row. You may come from a broken family or a hostile workplace. Your job is not to make all of it correct, because now you are with Jesus. Be intimate with Christ. Full stop. The Spirit will cause you to keep His statutes.

That is why the church has no business yelling at sinners to change their ways. If only the Spirit can change a person, then our church is open to everyone: to the divorced, to people with a broken understanding of sexuality, to people who do not yet follow Christ. I am not okay with whatever Jesus is not okay with, so this is not permission for anything. The question has simply moved from what I think is right and wrong to what

my Jesus tells me to do and say, and when the Spirit is leading, what comes out of my mouth is an invitation rather than condemnation.

I have made my own faith too much about what I do correctly. I behave, I slip, and then I go to Jesus about the slip, as if I needed Him one day this week while the man who walked in last Sunday needs Him seven and the divorced woman needs Him eight. That is an economy God never intended, and it produces arrogance. I need Jesus every single day of my life. Following Him means obeying Him and going where He sends, even to dinner with the Zacchaeus no one else would sit with. Jesus sat down among sinners, never to be turned by them, because He is the Lord who saves the lost.

Underneath all these rules, God is saying in Leviticus, I want so badly to be with you, and since you cannot make yourselves holy, I will make a way. He brought His people out of slavery "because the LORD loves you" (Deuteronomy 7:8). God saved you because He loves you, and He loves you deeply. Now that you have been saved, we get to surrender, submit, and obey Him forever.

## Blog

Last Sunday, at the end of the sermon on the Day of Atonement, I said something about communion that I want to come back to. The priests in Leviticus were required to sprinkle the blood on the altar, and Jesus has us eat it. Then I opened Leviticus 17 to prepare for this Sunday, and the first verse of our passage says this:

"If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people." (Leviticus 17:10)

That is about as direct as the Law gets. God speaks in the first person, and He includes the foreigner living among Israel along with everyone else. The rule is older than Israel, too. God gave it to Noah after the flood, for all of humanity: "But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). Observant Jews still keep it today, which is why kosher meat is salted to draw the blood out. And yet on the night before He died, Jesus handed His disciples a cup and told them to drink His blood. Shocking. It bothered the people who first heard it.

Leviticus gives the reason for the rule in the very next verse, and that verse explains every drop of blood in the book so far.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." (17:11)

Last week I said it still seems to be a mystery how this whole economy works, how blood can cover sin. This verse is the answer Leviticus gives. Blood stands for life. When an animal's blood was poured out at the altar, a life was given up, and God accepted that life in place of the life the worshiper owed. Nothing in the blood itself had any power. What mattered was that a life was given, and that God was the one who gave it. Israel did not invent this system or bargain for it. "I have given it for you." The blood was a gift before it was ever an offering.

That is why no one could eat it. The life belonged to God, and He had set it aside for one purpose, atonement. Even a hunter out in the field, far from any altar, had to pour the blood of his game onto the ground and cover it with earth (17:13). Every time an Israelite sat down to a meal with meat, the meal itself reminded them that a life had been given and that it was never theirs to take.

The men in the upper room had kept that law every day of their lives. They had never tasted blood. It was Passover, the meal that remembered the night God brought Israel out of Egypt, when the blood of a lamb on the doorposts meant the LORD would pass over the house (Exodus 12:13). Jesus told them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Then He took the cup.

"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28)

Earlier in His ministry Jesus had said something even harder: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). The reaction was exactly what you would expect from people raised on Leviticus 17. "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (6:60). Many of His disciples "turned back and no longer walked with him" (6:66).

Look closely at the words Jesus chose, because they are the words of Leviticus 17:11. The blood is poured out, it is for forgiveness, and it is for you. "This is my body, which is given for you... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20). In Leviticus God said, "I have given it for you on the altar." At the table Jesus says, "given for you." The law kept the blood off every table in Israel because God had set that life apart for atonement. The cup is that atonement, finally handed to us.

The apostles understood it this way. Even after the Last Supper, they asked Gentile believers to "abstain... from blood" (Acts 15:29). They never took the cup as permission to drink blood. They took it as Jesus giving them His own life.

This is where it goes against our logic. Something in us still feels like we have to keep the law ourselves, even when we know we'll fall short of it. Receiving Christ can feel too easy, as if we haven't done enough to deserve it. But we ingest Christ because He is our righteousness. Full stop. And when someone says, "But that breaks the law!" the answer is no. That is what the law was saving the blood for. Paul answers the same objection: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31).

Jesus was clear about what kind of eating He meant. "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). When His disciples stumbled over His words, He told them, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (6:63). We take Christ in by faith, and His life becomes ours.

The very next paragraph in Leviticus turns from the altar to the whole of life. Sunday's reading is Leviticus 18:1-5, and it begins like this: "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you" (18:2-3).

Before God gives a single "you shall not," He says, "I am the LORD your God." He says it again in verse 4 and again in verse 5. Israel did not obey in order to become

God's people. They were already His, brought out of Egypt under the blood, and these commands describe what life looks like for a people who belong to Him.

Egypt is behind them, the place they lived for four hundred and thirty years. Canaan is ahead, the culture they are about to live inside. God tells them they will be shaped by neither one. We have our own Egypt, the way of life we came from, and our own Canaan, the world we live in now. The life given for us is what brings us out of the first and keeps us from being shaped by the second. None of this makes us better than our neighbors, and Leviticus never says it does. What it keeps saying instead is "I am the LORD your God."

Read Leviticus 17 and the first five verses of chapter 18 this week (the rest of chapter 18 is coming on November 1), and then read John 6. Come Sunday ready to talk about Egypt and Canaan, and about the life God promises in 18:5 to the people who walk in His statutes.