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February 1, 2020
REFINING FIRE

Readings for today: [Job 22-24](#)

“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold...But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind.” (Job 23:8-10, 13-14)

How many of us love to quote the verse from Jeremiah 29? About the plans the Lord has for us? Plans for blessing and hope and a future? I love those words. I love those promises. But what we too often fail to consider is the path we have to take to get there. The path to God’s blessing is often filled with pain. Often filled with suffering. Often filled with struggle and heartbreak. It is lonely at times. It is rocky and steep and exhausting. Why? Because God’s blessings cannot come to us until we are empty. Until we have come to the end of ourselves. Until we have finally and fully and completely surrendered our stubborn wills to His will. How does this happen? There is only one way attested by Scripture. We must go through the refiner’s fire.

There are many ways to read Job. Most of the time, we read it from Job’s perspective. We feel his anguish and pain. We take his side. We question God’s judgment and justice alongside him. But do we ever stop to ponder the accusation of the enemy and whether or not it may be true? Does Job fear God for no reason? Is Job’s faith the result of the blessings in his life? Is it dependent on good things happening to him? Will it survive poverty, deprivation, tragedy, trauma, grief, sickness, and despair? There is really only one way to find out. Job must walk what may Christians down through the ages have called the “dark night of the soul.” A period of testing so great that it takes us to end of our own strength. The end of our own desires. The end of our own faith. It takes us into the darkness. Into the unknown. Into the silence. It is a terrifying journey but one we must take if we are to truly test our faith and find out if it is real.

Many know the name Andrew Brunson. Andrew is an EPC pastor and missionary to Turkey for over twenty years. A few years ago, he was picked up off the street and put in prison. He became the pawn in a political showdown. He was kept in solitary confinement. Denied access to those he loved. Held in miserable conditions. Tried in kangaroo courts. It was a terrifying experience for him. This past summer he shared his experiences with us at a national meeting. He talked about feeling the utter absence of God in his suffering. He talked about getting angry with God. Feeling let down by God. Abandoned by God. As he shared, my first thoughts went to Job. This is how he must have felt! When Andrew descended to the point of deepest despair. Contemplating suicide in his cell. He found himself crying out one name over and over again. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. And from that moment, his faith began to be restored.

Each of us has to endure the refiner’s fire. The details will look different. My dark night of the soul looks nothing like Andrew’s and little like Job’s. It involves the loss of a child. The implosion of a ministry. Almost losing my family. Coming face to face with my deepest fears and anxieties. In the darkness and silence of those experiences where I too felt the absence of God, I found myself saying over and over again on some level...Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. And my life has never been the same.

God will complete what He appoints for me. What a terrifying and comforting promise! Come what may. Come hell or high water. Through sacrifice and suffering. On the heights of great mountains and in the depths of deep valleys. God will carry me through. I will become what He has ordained me to become. I will be conformed to the image of His Son. This is what He does for Job. This is what He’s doing for Andrew. This is what He’s done for me and will do for all those who seek Him.

February 3, 2020
WISDOM

Readings for today: [Job 25-28](#)

Our world is filled with knowledge. We have so much knowledge we literally do not know what to do with it. So much information coming at us from every angle. The average person is inundated with well over a hundred emails every day. Not to mention texts. Phone calls. Social media interactions. A single issue of the New York Times contains more information than a person a hundred or so years ago might have learned in an entire year. The news is relentless. The fake news endless. Technology ubiquitous. We cannot escape. We cannot rest. And what has all this knowledge gained us? Rising rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. Rising rates of fear, violence, and hate. All this in a world that is demonstrably improving with each passing year. Why? What are we missing? What is the source of our persistent discontent?

Wisdom. Wisdom is the key. We simply do not know the path to wisdom or we refuse to take it. Today's reading from the Book of Job is on point. "Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold that they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore...Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots. He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light. "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living." (Job 28:1-2, 9-13) Human beings are capable of great things. We literally move mountains. We climb to the highest mountains. We delve in the deeps of the earth. We've learned to fly. We've explored the depths of the oceans. We know how to do so very much. But for all our strength and power and knowledge and ability, we have yet to find the path to wisdom. We didn't find it on the mountaintops. We searched for it in vain in the trenches of the seas. Despite our vast wealth we could not find a vendor who sold it.

We live in a world awash in desire. A world enslaved to feelings and emotions. A world adrift in an ocean of chaos. How else to explain heartbreaking insanity that passes for truth these days? We reject any kind of sexual boundaries and are shocked when it leads to abuse, objectification, disease, and violence. We reject our bodies and are shocked when it leads to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. We selfishly exploit the resources of the earth and are shocked when it leads to pollution and sickness and war. We refuse to repent over past oppressions and are shocked when it leads to racial conflict. We refuse to restrain our greed and are shocked when it leads to class warfare on a social and political stage. Our unwillingness and inability to follow the ways of Jesus leads us into all kinds of pain and suffering and heartache which we then turn around and try to pin on God. We are fools.

Only God knows the path to wisdom. Only God knows how to take all of our knowledge and order it in such a way that it leads to blessing and human flourishing. "From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.' "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place...and he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.' " (Job 28:20-23, 28) Fear the Lord. Submit to His ways. Surrender to His will. Let Him guide and direct your steps. This is the path to wisdom. God's promise to those who would follow Him is that He will lead us to green pastures and beside still waters. To places of peace where our souls will be restored. Job understands we cannot find these places on our own. We cannot get to these places in our own strength. Our knowledge is simply not enough. We must let God take us by the hand. We must trust God with our lives and our future. We must have faith that He knows best.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 29-32

February 4, 2020
FINDING TRUE FAITH

Readings for today: [Job 29-32](#)

Why do I love God? Why do I trust God? Why do I believe in God? Is it because of the blessings He's given me? Is it because of the benefits I've received? Is it because of the ways He has touched my life? Is God worthy of my love regardless of these things? Is He worthy simply because He is God? I remember being challenged by this thought in college. I was in a Bible study on Job and the teacher asked me if I would hold fast to my faith even if there were no rewards. I have to admit I didn't have a ready answer. I think at that point in time - if I were honest - I would have said no. My faith would fail if there was not some kind of benefit to me personally. But life goes on. I've suffered many things. I've seen ups and downs. I lived in plenty and in want. I've experienced hardship and loss. I've gone through the dark night of the soul more than once. And what I've discovered at the end of it all is that God is enough. God is sufficient. God is my reward.

Job is struggling mightily with this idea today. He wishes with all his heart he could go back to the days of joy. Days of plenty. Days when he was respected and esteemed. "Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent, when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were all around me...When I went out to the gate of the city, when I prepared my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose and stood; the princes refrained from talking and laid their hand on their mouth; the voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth." (Job 29:2-5, 7-10) He wishes he could go back to the days when he cared for the poor, the widow, and the fatherless. When he lifted up those who were struggling. Comforted those who were hurting. Came alongside those who were grieving. Job didn't just live his life for himself. He lived his life righteously. For others. For his community. He did all he could to be faithful and he received great rewards as a result.

But now the tables have turned. Everything he held dear has been taken away. He has lost his wealth. He has lost his health. He has lost his family. He has lost the esteem of his community. "But now they laugh at me, men who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock." (Job 30:1) He even feels abandoned by God Himself. "God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm. For I know that you will bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living." (Job 30:19-23) It's a cry of utter despair. A cry of utter dereliction. It sounds much like Jesus' cry from the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet even in his despair, Job reaches out for God. Even in the darkest part of the darkest night of his soul, Job clings to faith. "Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand, and in his disaster cry for help?" (Job 30:24)

At the end of the day when we have come to the end of our strength. The end of our hope. The end of our faith. We find God there waiting for us. God must be the treasure of our hearts. He must hold the highest place. He must have our deepest loyalties and our greatest allegiance. He alone must become our reward. The only way we discover true faith is through testing. Suffering. Hardship. Pain. It is there in the darkness as we stumble about with no resources to bring to bear and no moves to make that we discover if we really believe. What have the trials of your life revealed about your faith in God? Where have you turned in the time of your greatest suffering? Do you - like Job - reach out your hand in midst of the ruins of your life to God?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 33-36

February 5, 2020
REDEMPITIVE SUFFERING

Readings for today: [Job 33-36](#)

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7)

“For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:10-11)

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

There is such a thing as redemptive suffering. Suffering with a purpose. We may not always see that purpose and, in fact, it is often only revealed upon reflection after the fact. But that doesn't mean all suffering is meaningless. Or all suffering is bad. Or all suffering is to be avoided. Clearly, the first century believers suffered. 10 of the 12 Apostles would be tortured and executed in excruciating ways for their faith. (Judas committed suicide and John, though he suffered, died of old age.) Throughout the first three centuries of the church's existence, Christians were burned as torches in Nero's garden. Thrown to the lions for sport in the arena. In certain regions of the Empire, they were systematically rounded up and killed. This was not only true back then but remains true in certain places around the world today. According to Christianity Today, it is estimated that over 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Jesus. They suffered and died in places all over the earth. Ottoman Turkey. Nazi Germany. Soviet Russia. Communist China and North Korea. Uganda. Sudan. Mexico. Columbia. And the suffering continues. I have seen it firsthand in Ethiopia and have spoken to eye witnesses in South Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia.

The introduction of Elihu to the narrative represents a turning point in Job. At first glance, Elihu just seems to be piling on. Repeating the same old tired arguments of Job's friends. But a careful reading of the text reveals a significant shift. Elihu bursts on the scene declaring his anger at both Job and his three friends. (Job 32:1-5) He believes he has something new to offer that has not yet been said. So what is it that Elihu brings to the table? It is the idea that God does allow the righteous to suffer in order to purify and to save. Perhaps the key passage is Job 33:12-30...

“Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, 'He will answer none of man's words'? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings...Remember, they had no Bible. No written records. So the Word of God would come to them in visions and dreams. Why? To punish? To judge? To wound? To destroy? No...So that God may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. This is deeply significant as it adds a new layer of meaning to the story.

God does allow suffering but it's for our good. He uses suffering to purge the pride from us. The pride Job himself suffers from. Yes, Job is a righteous man. Yes, Job is a blameless man. But Job is also a sinful man. Though he has a heart after God, he is not perfect and God will use his suffering (as we will see at the end of the book) to cleanse the depths of Job's soul.

God not only warns us in dreams and visions and through His Word, he also uses our physical pain for our good and for His glory. "Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones, so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food. His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. His soul draws near the pit, and his life to those who bring death." If we follow the logic of Job's friends - whom Elihu rebukes strongly - we would conclude that those who suffer deserve it. They should go down to death. But that's not where Elihu lands. His God is not a harsh judge but a faithful, loving Father who delivers His children ultimately from their pain and suffering. "If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, and he is merciful to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom; let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor'; then man prays to God, and he accepts him; he sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness. He sings before men and says: 'I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me. He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light.' "Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life." The key phrase being that last sentence. It is God who does all these things for man in order to bring his soul back from the pit, lighted with the light of life.

This understanding squares with what Christians have said throughout the centuries. Martyrs facing their death without fear. Those who suffer enduring for the sake of something greater. They understand God is at work even in the middle of their pain. They understand suffering to be part of this broken, ruined, created order. Ultimately, they embrace suffering as part of following Christ who Himself suffered on behalf of all humanity. Viewed from this angle, suffering is hard but good. God using it to bring about His will and His glory while also continuing to sanctify and purify own hearts in the midst of it all. The reality is Job needs to be humbled and indeed will be humbled before the Lord of Hosts. We need to be humbled as well. This is one of the most important lessons from the Book of Job for all of us.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 37-40:1-5, Psalms 19

February 6, 2020
GOD IS GOD

Readings for today: [Job 37- 40: 5; Psalm 19](#)

So this is the moment we've all been waiting for...God finally showing up! God finally speaking. God finally defending His actions, explaining things, letting us in on what He's been thinking. Except that's not what happens. Instead, we are given these words in Job 40:2, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." I remember being frustrated the first time I read them. Even a bit angry with God. But over the years I have come to a deeper understanding of who God is and who I am before Him. Literally, I am nothing. I am a sinner. I live in a constant state of rebellion against God and His ways. I am corrupt. Conceived in iniquity as Psalm 51 so eloquently puts it. I am totally depraved. Even my best thoughts and actions on my best day are poisoned by pride and selfishness. That is who I am without Christ. That is my natural state of being. That is how I was born into this world. Furthermore, even now that I am in Christ. Redeemed. Beloved. Given a new heart and new spirit. I am still finite. I am still dust and ashes. I cannot fathom why the sun rises each morning or the flowers bud each spring much less probe the mysteries of God's purposes. They remain unsearchable for me. Unfathomable. Beyond my limited understanding.

This is how God answers Job. There is no reason for Job's suffering. Not that he can understand. Not in this moment. Not while he's suffering and in pain. Not while he's demanding in his pride an audience before God. Not while he's upset and angry. Job must be humbled. He must come to an understanding of who he is and who he's addressing. "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." (Job 40:4-5) This is what I love about Job. This is what makes Job righteous and blameless in God's sight. This is ultimately why God will affirm His servant Job and judge Job's friends. Job is repentant. Job is humble. Job is contrite. When God finally answers him out of the whirlwind, Job responds with reverence, fear, and awe. The only appropriate response when we come before the Lord. He gets on his knees. He bows his head. He closes his mouth. He covers his eyes. He is finished speaking. There are no more words to say. God is present. God is here.

God is God and we are not. That's the essence of the message of the Book of Job and it's a tough one to swallow. The reality is we all like to pretend we are gods. Masters of our own universe. Captains of our own destiny. We like to pretend that we are in control when in fact we are not. God is moving in ways we cannot see or understand. He is doing things above and beyond us. He is working all things for His glory in the world. He has His purposes. We are simply His instruments. Beloved? Yes. Cherished? Yes. Esteemed? Yes. But our relationship with God comes with responsibilities. Our adoption into God's family as His sons and daughters comes with a certain set of expectations. Though we are heirs to all things in Christ, we are not Christ. Though the Father has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, we are not to assume this makes us into gods ourselves. Humility and repentance are the key to a well-lived life before God and Job shows us the way.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 40:6-42:17, Psalms 29

February 7, 2020
FEAR OF THE LORD

Readings for today: [Job 40:6-42:17](#); [Psalms 29](#)

I am often asked about the “fear of the Lord.” After all, the Bible says it is the key to wisdom. The key to understanding. The key to a life well-lived before God. But what does it look like? Are we supposed to tremble in terror before God? Are we supposed to pass out in fear? Does it relate to reverence? Awe? Humility? What does it look like to fear the Lord? I think Job gives us the perfect picture.

“Then Job answered the Lord and said: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6)

God is God and we are not. This is the fundamental truth of our existence. Who are we to question God? Who are we to challenge God? Who are we to doubt God? We are the clay. He is the potter. We are the instruments. He is the maestro. We are the tools. He is the craftsman. Thankfully, because God is gracious and merciful, He condescends to speak with us. Meet with us. Reveal Himself to us. He certainly doesn’t have to. He is not bound to. He is under no compulsion except that which He sets for Himself. He is not effected by any force outside His own will. He is perfectly free to do whatever He pleases and the good news is this...it pleases Him to dwell with us! It pleases Him to be in relationship with us! It pleases Him to give His life for us!

What a glorious truth! This same God who spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. The same God who confronted Job to answer the most profound questions of creation. The same God who allowed Job to suffer so much. This same God suffers even more for us. Jesus willingly lets go of the wealth and riches of heaven. He empties Himself of His divine knowledge and wisdom. He gives up His glory and honor as the only begotten Son of God. He gives the full measure of His devotion on the cross where He suffers and dies the most horrific death imaginable. All to save. All to deliver. All to rescue those He loves so much.

In the face of such love, all we can do is repent. Fall on our knees before Him in awe and wonder. Gaze at the Son as He suffers for our sins. Feel our hearts filled to overflowing with gratitude for this great gift. Sing praises to His great name. Lift up our lives before Him as living sacrifices. Offer all that we are and all that we have to Him as an act of worship. Truly we have uttered words too wonderful for us! Spoken of things which we did not understand! Seen things which we had no right to see and experienced things we did not deserve! All praise be to Jesus! King of kings! Lord of lords! God of gods! Beloved of my soul!

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 1-4

February 8, 2020
EXTRAORDINARY POWER OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

Readings for today: [Exodus 1-4](#)

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” (Exodus 1:8) One of the darkest chapters in Israel’s history begins with these ominous words. A new Pharaoh has risen. One who did not know Joseph. One who had forgotten what God had done for Egypt through Joseph. One who saw Joseph’s descendants as a threat to his power. One can understand his trepidation. A foreign people living on the eastern edge of the Nile delta who have multiplied exceedingly over the generations and grown strong. They worship a strange god you do not know. They have strange customs you do not follow. They speak a foreign language you do not understand. It is easy to understand the source of this new Pharaoh’s fear.

So he takes action. He enslaves them. Subjects them to abuse, harsh treatment, and a lifetime of hard labor. But the more they oppressed the Israelites, the more numerous and powerful they became. Anxious about the potential of an uprising, Pharaoh calls for draconian population control. He orders the midwives to kill every male child that is born. In this way, he hopes to reduce their numbers to a more manageable size. But the midwives courageously defy the king. Denying themselves, they save the male children from death. It’s an incredible act of faith.

Shiprah and Puah. Their names are important. Two ordinary women engaged in an ordinary profession. There is nothing remarkable about them. Nothing special or unique. They have no biblical training. No seminary degree. They come from no special lineage and carry no family name. We do not know their tribe or their background. We simply know their names. Their occupation. And the one thing that does set them apart...their fear of God. These two women pave the way for Israel’s deliverer, Moses, to be born. They make it possible for God’s salvation to come. Through their act of selfless obedience, they create the conditions for what will become the seminal event in Judaism. The Exodus. Without them, there is no Charlton Heston. :-) No Ten Commandments. No Moses. Without them, there is no parting of the Red Sea or journey to the Promised Land. Without them, the Hebrews eventually die out. Cease to exist. The covenant God made with Abraham would be broken and all of salvation history go defunct. All because two women decided to obey God and perform their professional duties faithfully under threat of death.

Do you think about your profession in this way? Do you connect what you do with what you believe? Is God on your radar screen as you go about your day to day activities? It’s amazing how often God uses the ordinary and mundane to accomplish His purposes. In my experience, it is not the pastors and church leaders who move the dial of the Kingdom but the faithful man or woman who often goes unnoticed. They spend their days working at their job. Caring for their families. Praying and studying the Bible. And eternity moves at the sound of their voice. The wheel of God’s salvation history turns by their hand. It’s truly amazing. What could God do with an accountant? A truck driver? A fast food worker? A sanitation engineer? What could God do with a doctor? A lawyer? A university professor? What could God do with a teacher? A mother? A father? A friend? The answer is...everything. Anything. God uses those who are available and humble and willing. Does that describe you?

February 10, 2020
DELIVERER

Readings for today: [Exodus 5-9](#)

“I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.”(Exodus 6:6-8)

I remember sitting in a seminary classroom listening to a professor discount the Exodus. He decried it as a mythological story. An event that never took place. At least not in the way it's told by the Bible. Instead, he suggested all kinds of replacement theories of his own. Each one more strange than the next. He argued it was a propaganda piece designed to give a group of people an identity. He argued the original Hebrews were a migrant, nomadic people who needed to give themselves political justification for settling down. He argued the Exodus never happened as a mass event but a series of migrations over time. All this sounded well and good until one student raised their hand and asked, “How can we describe God as deliverer if He never actually delivered anyone?” Silence. The professor began to stutter and stumble but the damage was done. His lofty arguments brought low by the simple, profound truth that propaganda pieces simply do not have the staying power he suggested. The fact that Israel has been telling and re-telling this story for centuries is strong evidence for its historical veracity. Furthermore, the fact that so many marginalized and oppressed people have found inspiration and hope in this story suggests it must have a basis in truth. And perhaps most damningly, how in the world can we honestly believe in God as deliverer if He never actually acted within human history to deliver His people?

Thankfully, the overwhelming testimony of history stands against those who would seek to diminish this story. Just the fact that the Jewish people still exist when so many other tribal people groups disappeared should stand for something. After all, Israel was never a powerful empire like Egypt. Never attained cultural hegemony like Greece. Never exerted a powerful military presence like Rome or Babylon or Persia. At best, even under King Solomon, she remained a regional power, taking advantage of the lulls between the much greater empires that surrounded them. Secondly, arguing from the “silence” of the archaeological record has never been persuasive. Those who decry the lack of evidence in the Sinai peninsula for a mass migration of people have to acknowledge the difficulty of uncovering evidence that is over 3,000 years old. After all, they are finding military equipment in Sinai from the 1973 Yom Kippur War buried in over 52 feet of sand! Thirdly, it is important to read the Bible honestly. The author of the Exodus is clearly writing from the perspective of a Jew. As such, he had no interest in presenting an unbiased account. This doesn't make the story any less true but it does mean we have to read critically, lest we miss the overarching point. God is God.. Pharaoh is not. God is sovereign even over the greatest empires on the earth. God does what He wills. When He wills. For the primary purpose of promoting His own glory. Some would say this makes God an narcissist. Quite the contrary. It's part and parcel of what makes Him God.

The truly incredible part of the story to me is not even the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It's the fact that God chooses to reveal Himself at all. If there is a God who stands outside time and space. A God who creates and rules over all He has made. An omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Being who exists eternally in perfect relationship within Himself. Then He has no need of me. No need

of us. No need of a people to call His own. This God has no need to enter history. No need to reveal Himself. He is not beholden to us. He doesn't owe us a thing. But what the Exodus makes clear is that this God desires a relationship with us. He makes Himself known to us. Not only that but He makes Himself known to us in a particular way. He is deliverer. He is redeemer. He is savior.

As seminal an event as the Exodus is for the people of Israel, it is but a foreshadowing of the "Exodus" that will take place on the cross. As Jesus hangs between heaven and earth, all of the "plagues" God stored up against the sin of humankind are poured out on Him. He cries out in anguish. He thirsts. He suffers. He is in tremendous pain. He feels the lash of the whip. He endures the harsh words of the taskmaster. By becoming sin for us, Christ delivers us. He rescues us. He breaks the power of sin and death and rescues us from spiritual slavery to the devil. In short, He sets us free. This, friends, is how God chooses to make Himself known to the world. As a God who delivers! A God who redeems! A God who saves! May you place your trust in Him today!

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 10-13

February 11, 2020
DOES GOD HARDEN HEARTS?

Readings for today: [Exodus 10-13](#)

Today we have to grapple with one of the deepest mysteries in all of Scripture. God hardening Pharaoh's heart. Before we even get started, let's acknowledge the obvious. We hate this truth. It runs counter to everything we've been raised to believe about free will, everyone getting a choice, God loving everyone, etc. It calls into question God's justice. God's righteousness. How could a righteous God harden someone's heart to the point where they are kept from saving faith? And yet, if we are courageous enough to take the text at face value, we are left with no other conclusion.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants..." (Ex. 10:1)

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go." (Ex. 10:20)

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go." (Ex. 10:27)

"Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land." (Ex. 11:10)

God is relentless with this man. He will not let him repent. He will not let him escape judgment. He will not let him give in until his nation lies in ruins. God will not let up until there is no doubt who is God and who is not. Now this is hard for us. This is a different side to God that we aren't used to. A God who reigns over the affairs of humanity. A God who rules over the universe with a firm hand. A God who is to be feared as much as loved. So again, the question is pressed...how could a righteous God harden someone's heart to the point where they are kept from saving faith?

The key is how we define righteousness. Do we define it from a human perspective? Or a Biblical one? According to Scripture, God's highest aim is NOT the salvation of His people. As important as this is, it is merely the means God chooses to achieve a higher end. What is that "higher end?" The full display of God's power and glory and majesty and sovereignty over all creation. God's greatest aim is to fill the earth with His glory. His grand design calls for all creation to honor His great name. This is the purpose for which we were created and it is clearly revealed in the Exodus narrative.

"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." (Ex. 7:3-5)

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord." (Ex. 10:1-2)

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." (Ex. 11:9)

And the Apostle Paul affirms God's purposes when he looked back on the Exodus story. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Rom. 9:17)

The point is clear. God will make His name known. And He chooses to make His name known through "vessels of mercy" (His people) and "vessels of wrath" (not His people). And lest we think this somehow compromises God's justice or righteousness or goodness or it just isn't fair; we have to remember our condition before God. All of us are dead in our trespasses. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. All of us deserve death and the torments of hell forever. We are in NO position - broken, sinful, and rebellious as we are - to pass judgment on God. God is free to choose to use whom He wills in whatever way He wills and this in no way compromises His integrity.

So what does this mean for us? Does it mean we should be scared of God? Does it mean we are at the mercy of a God who is arbitrary and capricious? Not at all. In Jesus Christ, God has provided the perfect Passover Lamb! He Himself has become the sacrifice that saves! His blood delivers us from the angel of death! And because we have no idea whom God has chosen, we should go forth and gladly, even boldly, share this good news with the world!

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 14-18

February 12, 2020
WALK BY FAITH

Readings for today: [Exodus 14-18](#)

Christians are called to walk by faith and not by sight. But what does this mean? For Israel, it meant taking a literal journey through the wilderness. It meant placing their lives literally in the hands of God.

They are camped at the shores of the Red Sea. Celebrating their newfound freedom. But then they hear the warhorns of the Egyptians. They see the dust from the chariots rising on the horizon. They feel the ground rumble beneath their feet. They cry out in fear. In anguish, they look to Moses who points them to the salvation of God. “Fear not! Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord which He will work for you today! For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see them again. The Lord will fight for you and you only have to be silent.” Trembling, Israel takes their first steps at the water’s edge only to watch it miraculously divide in front of them. They move through on dry ground. Once on the other side, they watch in awe as God brings the sea back together, consuming the Egyptian host. Moses and Miriam record one of the oldest songs of praise in the Bible.

They begin their journey to the Promised Land but quickly run out of water. They are parched. They are thirsty. They are afraid of dying. When they finally find water, it is bitter and poisoned and makes them sick. Again, they cry out in fear. They look to Moses who points them to the salvation of God. He throws a log into the well and the water became sweet. Not only that but he leads them to a place called Elim where the water is plentiful. An oasis in the desert.

They set out yet again. Into the wilderness. Into the desert. Food is scarce. They are hungry. Their stomachs are empty. They afraid of dying. They cry out in fear. They look to Moses and Aaron who point them again to the salvation of God. Manna will rain from heaven on a daily basis. God will provide for His people. God teaching His people to walk by faith and not by sight. “In the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord...” They wake up. Quail covered the camp. A fine, flake-like substance covered the ground. They gather. They eat their full. It is an effort they must repeat each day as God teaches them to rely on His daily bread.

What does this look like in your life? As I think back over the years, I can see where God was at work teaching me to walk by faith. I have experienced success and failure. I have been to the top of the mountain and in the darkest of valleys. I have seen pain and suffering. I have experienced hurt and heartbreak. I have been afraid. I have cried out to the Lord. Every time He has come through. Not always in the way I wanted. Not always in the way I thought best. Not always according to my plan. But always with enough to get me to the next step. Walking by faith in this world is not about never having a need. It’s not about the fulfillment of all our desires. It’s not about us living in health and wealth and abundance. It is about learning to rely on God each and every day. Trusting Him for every step in the journey. Believing Him even when things seem bleak and circumstances dire. God is with us. God is teaching us to depend on Him. Open your hands. Open your hearts. Listen to Him. Learn from Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 19-21

February 13, 2020
FORMING A PEOPLE

Readings for today: [Exodus 19-21](#)

Today's reading represents a hinge point in the Book of Exodus. We move from sweeping epic to Israelite case law and it's easy to start to skip over this part. I remember my eyes glazing over during this section the first several times I read through the Bible in a year. However, if we slow down and read carefully, some wonderful truths are revealed.

First, a look at the big picture. Israel arrives at Mt. Sinai as a rag-tag group of folks with no national identity or charter. The only reason they've made it this far is due to the miraculous intervention of God. He saved them. He defeated the Egyptians. He fed them. He watered them. He has met every need. His goal is to get them to Sinai in one piece where He will begin to teach them what it means to be His people. Once they are at Mt. Sinai, God comes down to meet them face to face. The revelation of God is so intense, the mountain shakes and burns. The people's hearts melt and they tremble in fear. God's holiness is so fierce that the people must be protected from it lest they die. Then God speaks. He writes the Ten Commandments with His own finger on tablets of stone. He dictates His laws to Moses and in doing so, he shapes a nation.

The laws God issues are revelatory in nature. They are similar and yet critically different than the laws of the nations around them. Almost all societies, even ancient ones, have laws prohibiting murder, stealing, etc. Old Testament law is unique, however, in that it protects women, children, and families. It restricts revenge by instituting the principle of lex talionis - otherwise known as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth" - thus making justice proportional. Furthermore, it makes slavery a voluntary arrangement. Available for those who cannot pay their debts. Freedom was a guarantee unless the slave himself chose otherwise. Protections were built in to prevent abuse and slave trading was punishable by death. "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death." (Ex. 21:16) These are massive advances in human rights and set the nation of Israel apart from the other nations around them.

This is exactly God's point, by the way. Remember, in "Abraham" all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It will be through Abraham and his descendants (now starting to "outnumber" the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore) that the world will come to know Yahweh is God. Pharaoh's already learned this lesson the hard way. Other nations now have the opportunity to learn from Israel. To model their own national life and laws after the Law of God. In giving Israel His Law, God is setting them up to serve as a light to the nations. An example to the Gentiles. He wants the nations of the earth to see what life looks like in His Kingdom. When Israel is faithful to the Law, the nations will flock to her. She will experience blessing and peace and prosperity. When she disobeys the Law, she will be judged and punished thereby continuing to serve God's purposes as He makes an example of them in His wrath. The point of it all is that God is now in relationship with Israel and Israel with God. She is bound to Him through His saving grace and He will never let her go.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 22-24

February 14, 2020
DIVINE RHYTHMS

Readings for today: [Exodus 22-24](#)

One of the few things everyone seems to agree on these days is the growing mental health crisis in America. So much is made of the levels of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions that erode our quality of life and seem to present insurmountable barriers to human flourishing. Sadly, too many turn to pharmaceuticals for answers. Opioids. Psychotropics. Pot. Now let me be quick to say I am not against taking medication to correct chemical imbalances. I myself have been taking a pill every day since I was about 23 to correct my thyroid condition. So I get it on some level. However, it is clear to many that we are an over-medicated society. We seem unwilling to make the kind of lifestyle changes necessary to protect our physical, mental, and emotional health. One of the main areas we see this is in our addiction to work.

"Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed." (Exodus 23:12)

Imagine you are an Israelite. You've just been set free from slavery. From an existence where you were forced to endure a life of hard labor. Seven days a week. Four weeks a month. 52 weeks a year. Never a day off. Never allowed to rest. Never allowed to take a break and a breath and just relax. This is the only life you've known and it is the only life your ancestors have known for generations. It would be tempting to assume this is just how life is. You're born. You work. You die. But God has a different plan for His people. He doesn't view His people primarily as cogs in a machine or tools to be used or commodities to be used up but as creatures made in His image. As such, they literally have hardwired into their DNA a divine rhythm. A way of life modeled after the life of God. God works six days and rests. Human beings work six days and then rest. On a very practical level this is what it means to follow God.

Most psychologists will tell you the root of our mental health crisis begins with our lack of sleep. Human beings are biologically designed to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Furthermore, we are not robots. We were not made to work 24/7. We must get rest. We must take a break. We need downtime. When we don't get these things, we end up anxious and afraid. We end up depressed and struggling with despair. Left unchecked, we engage in self-harm and entertain thoughts of suicide.

What solution does God offer us in the midst of our addiction to work and busyness? Sabbath. Rest. One day a week where we refrain the work we do the other six days. A break. A day dedicated to worship and rest and restorative practices. A day devoted to recovery. Mentally. Physically. Emotionally from the toil and trials of the rest of the week. What does it look like? Depends on the person. Jesus said, "Sabbath is made for man not man for the Sabbath." In other words, Sabbath is a gift. It is given to us to use for our own benefit. As such, it will look different for every person.

God is passionate about us keeping a Sabbath because God is passionate about the health of His people. He longs for us to experience rest. Relaxation. Peace. Hope. Joy. These are the fruits of a Sabbath lifestyle. So take a moment and examine your life. Do you take one day out of every seven to rest? To relax? To refrain from the activities you do the other six days? Do you intentionally set aside time for worship? For yourself? For those activities that fill your soul? How are you seeking to maintain the divine rhythm hardwired into your soul?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 25-28

February 15, 2020
FINDING OURSELVES IN THE STORY

Readings for today: [Exodus 25-28](#)

So many reading plans start to crash at this part of the journey. Making our way through the latter parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is a real struggle. It's easy to breeze over the blueprints of the tabernacle. Skim through the thread counts of the priestly garments. Get lost in the weeds of all the laws in Leviticus. And then stop reading altogether once we hit the statistical reports in the Book of Numbers. I've been doing this for over twenty years. I get it. The readings start to feel boring. Pointless. Worthless.

But perhaps that's because we read the Bible selfishly. Perhaps it's because we read with a desire to "get something out of it" rather than read ourselves into it. Perhaps it's because we project our own experiences and biases and cultural understandings back onto the text which makes it feel so foreign and strange. We look at all this detail and we can't understand it. We wonder why God's so concerned about the furnishings of the sanctuary or what His people eat or what they wear. We struggle to grasp the significance of all the offerings the people bring and why God demands such things in the first place. We start to wonder if the God of the Old Testament truly is capricious and arbitrary and not worthy to be trusted.

This is why it is so important to pay attention to verses like Exodus 25:22. "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel." It's important to stop. Ponder. Pray over verses like this that we will find sprinkled throughout the text. It reminds us that everything God does has a purpose. And that purpose is to make it possible for His people to be in relationship with Him. Take a step back for just a minute. The omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent God of the universe is under no obligation to interact with His people. God could just as easily wash His hands of this whole human mess when Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden. He has a universe to run. Surely He has better things He could be doing with His time? And yet, He chooses to love us. He chooses to reveal Himself to us. He chooses to meet with us. Dwell with us. Live in covenantal relationship with us. It's astounding!

Sin causes us to forget our place. We are not the center of the universe. So in order to read the Bible for all its worth, we have to set aside our natural, sinful inclination to make it all about us. These books were not written so that we could get something out of them. Some nugget of wisdom or inspiration to put on a coffee cup or post on Twitter. The Bible was written to describe the history of God's interactions with the people He had chosen from among the nations of the earth. This is their story. This is their history. And we only "get something out of it" if we seek first to immerse ourselves in it.

What does that look like? Here we have to exercise our imaginations. Imagine being a young Israelite child. Each night before bed you see the scars on your father's back from the whips he endured in Egypt. Your mother, now in her late twenties, looks ancient because of the physical, psychological, and sexual trauma she's endured. Your older siblings tell you very real horror stories of what life was like when you and your family were slaves. Each day is a struggle for survival. You barely have enough to eat. Barely have enough to drink. Your legs are tired from the miles you've walked. Your back hurts from the burdens you've carried. And now you find yourself at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The summit surrounded by smoke and fire. The ground shakes occasionally. Thunder rolls. Some of the older people tell you it's the voice of God. You've seen His power firsthand. The plagues. The pillar of fire.

The parting of the Red Sea. But you don't know this God. You've never met this God. You have idea if you can trust this God. All you know is that He seems to be on your side...for now.

How would you learn more about this God? How would learn to love this God? How would you learn to worship this God? Only if He chose to teach you. Only if He chose to reveal Himself to you. Only if He chose to dwell with you. So Moses and Aaron start to give you instructions on how to build a sanctuary. A place for God to dwell. You start to meet with this God. You learn to recognize His voice. You learn to follow His will. A relationship begins to form. You feel loved. Protected. Cared for. Watched over. Then Moses and Aaron start to issue laws that will govern your collective life together. A national identity begins to take shape. You realize you are part of something bigger than yourself. Part of a not only a family and a clan and a tribe but a nation that God Himself has chosen out of all the nations of the earth. And as your heart fills with gratitude and love for all God has done for you and your people, you begin to bring Him offerings. Silver and gold and the finest animals of your flock. Not because you have to but because you want to return back to Him the best of what He's given to you.

As you read over the next several days and weeks, keep pushing yourself to become part of the story. Don't just read for information. Don't even read for inspiration. Read with a desire to find yourself in the story. Read with a desire to come alongside and experience life with our spiritual fathers and mothers. Read with a desire to understand what life must have been like for them as they were learning all about this new God. And as you walk in their sandals a bit, trust God to reveal Himself to you in new and fresh ways.

February 17, 2020
THE POWER OF PRAYER

Readings for today: [Exodus 29-32](#)

Exodus 32 is an incredibly important chapter in the Bible. It speaks to humanity's rebellious nature. The holiness of God. The power of prayer. The consequences of sin. It is deep and profound and a careful reader will absolutely marvel at what she reads.

First, humanity's rebellious nature. We are so impatient. We have such a hard time delaying gratification. When Moses is delayed on top of the mountain - remember there is still fire and smoke coming from the summit - the people decide to take matters into their own hands. They decide to worship God as they please rather than stay true to what God demands. Aaron, in a display of incredibly weak leadership, plays to the crowd's desires. He fashions a calf. Builds an altar. Declares a feast unto the Lord. This is not what God wants. Now we do need to remember that this scene is playing out in two different locations. Moses is hearing from God on top of Mt. Sinai. He has yet to return and give the people the law. Aaron is in charge down below, trying to keep the peace. The people honestly have no idea what's happened to Moses. Perhaps they even fear he is dead. So let's assume the best. They want to worship God. They want to show their devotion. They want to let God know how much they love Him and are thankful for His deliverance. But their failure to wait. Their failure to worship God as He deserves and as He demands is a critical mistake. (One we still too often unfortunately repeat...)

So the camera zooms up to the top of the mountain where God and Moses are still deep in conversation. The Lord spoke to Moses: "Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly..." (Ex. 32:7) God is angry. His righteous wrath is now aroused. The sin of the people has encroached on His holiness. It offends Him deeply. Viscerally. Their sin is a stench to Him. So He tells Moses - this is important - "your" people whom "you" brought up from the land of Egypt have committed a great sin. God is disowning them as he prepares to destroy them and start all over with Moses. "The Lord also said to Moses: "I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone, so that My anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." (Ex. 32:9-10) Essentially, God is saying to Moses, I will wipe them out and make you a new Abraham. I will reset the deck yet again and start over with the one faithful man I can find.

Moses is quick to respond. And he prays one of the most important prayers in human history. "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people." (Ex. 32:11-14) Moses is quick to remind God whose people He's really talking about. These are God's people. They are the people God delivered by His own hand. If God were to destroy them, God's reputation would suffer. The Egyptians - before whom God has made Himself known - would begin to doubt and question Him. The promise God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would become null and void. This is an incredible prayer of faith. An incredible prayer of trust.

Trusting God to stay true to His character. Trusting God to stay faithful to His promises. There is no question in Moses' mind that God will remain true to Himself so Moses prays in confidence and faith. .

What are we to make of such a prayer? Is Moses talking God down? Is he talking God off the ledge? Does Moses' prayer enact some kind of change in God? Is God the kind of God who could lose control in anger and lash out at His people? These are really important questions to wrestle with as we read. What I believe is happening here is something similar to what took place between Abraham and God when they discussed the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is specifically inviting us into a deep relationship with Himself. A relationship where our prayers are real. Where the thoughts and desires and emotions of our hearts are taken seriously by God. God is still free to act as He sees fit. He still destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah after all. But He did rescue Lot and his family so perhaps Abraham's prayer was answered? Here Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. He steps into the gap God provides and prays in great faith. His prayer thus creates a new situation to which God responds. No longer are we just talking about God's holiness and the people's sin. Now we have a man of faith stepping into the gap. A mediator who intercedes. And God honors the intercessor by relenting from the disaster He had prepared. (By the way, the Book of Hebrews picks up this imagery and assigns Jesus the role of eternal intercessor before the Father.)

Moses' intercession doesn't mean there aren't consequences for sin. Moses comes down the mountain. He shatters the tablets at the foot of the mountain. Grounds the calf to dust and makes the people drink it. There is death as the Levites have to kill almost three thousand people before the sinful revelry settles down. And the chapter closes with a plague from the Lord and this promise, "Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."

What do we learn from all this? God takes worship seriously. We are to worship Him in the way He demands and the way He deserves. God takes prayer seriously. Intercessory prayer is powerful and effective when it comes from the lips of a righteous man or woman. God takes sin seriously. He will not let us escape the consequences of our actions though He does provide a way - through Jesus - for us to be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 33-36

February 18, 2020
REVELATION

Readings for today: [Exodus 33-36](#)

Imagine you are an ancient Israelite. Camping out at the foot of Sinai. You've spent generations enslaved in Egypt. All you know about God is what you've seen and experienced. Unbridled power over the heavens and the earth. Terrifying plagues. Pillars of fire and cloud. Seas parting. Manna falling. Smoke and fire and thunder and earthquakes emanating from the top of a mountain. Swift and harsh judgment when you crossed this deity. This God is certainly not safe. He is certainly not tame. He is certainly not domesticated to your needs, wants, and desires. You probably have a lot of questions about this God. Can He be trusted? Will He be faithful? Will He keep His promises?

You look to Moses. The man who speaks with this God face to face. The man who seems to know this God intimately. The man who intercedes with this God on your behalf. Moses, tell us about this God. Moses, who is this God? Moses, does this God even have a name? Yes. His name is YHWH. I am who I am. He is "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7) Ahhh. Things are now starting to come into focus. This God is not simply omnipotent. He is benevolent. He is gracious. He is merciful. He is faithful. He is true. He abounds in steadfast love. And though His justice will be meted out over three to four generations, His favor will last forever. This is good news! This is great news! This is the God of Israel! The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Now we see! Now we understand! Now we worship not just in fear but in awe and wonder at all God has done!

As I shared the other day, you have put yourself into the story. You have to put yourself in the sandals of an ancient Israelite. They do not have the benefit we do of looking back post-resurrection. They do not know anything about a Messiah. They haven't yet seen the Promised Land. The kingdom God will forge under David's leadership is still generations away. There have been no prophetic warnings. No psalms written. No proverbs issued. They haven't even been given the Levitical Law. No wonder they struggle. No wonder they rebel. No wonder they complain. They have so little to go on here.

Not so with us. We have the full revelation of God. As the Apostle John says so beautifully, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." (1 John 1:1-4) John is referring to Jesus, of course. The perfect revelation of God. The perfect icon of God. The perfect image of God. The Word of God made flesh and blood and come to dwell among us. In Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. In Christ is the wisdom and power of God. In Christ is the joy and peace of God. Christ is the mercy of God. The grace of God. The faithfulness of God. The steadfast love of God. What God first revealed to Moses up on that mountain comes to its fullest expression in a manger in Bethlehem. "And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

How did Moses respond when God revealed Himself to him? He bowed his face to the ground in worship. How did Israel respond when God revealed Himself to them? They bowed their faces to the ground in worship. How do we respond to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? We bow our faces to the ground in worship. Friends, we worship a jealous God. A God who cares deeply about receiving the worship He deserves and the worship He demands. How are you living your life today as an act of worship?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 37-40

February 19, 2020
STAYING IN OUR LANE

Readings for today: [Exodus 37-40](#)

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.” (Exodus 40:34-38)

An atheist accidentally broke Twitter the other day when he/she posted, “Christianity is a belief that one God created a universe 13.79 billion years old, 93 billion light years in diameter (1 light year = approx 6 trillion miles), consisting of over 200 billion galaxies, each containing an average of 200 billion stars, all to have a personal relationship with you.” What they intended for snark, Christians naturally picked up and retweeted like crazy as a great description of what our faith believes. It’s truly astounding to consider. The God who created all things. The universe and all that is in it. The earth and all that is in it. The God who knit each of us together in our mother’s wombs. Who calls each star by name. Who sets the planets in motion. Who governs the universe by His Word. This same God desires to have a relationship with us. Desires to dwell with us. Desires to have a people to call His very own.

Perhaps this puts everything we’re reading into proper perspective. I know it’s easy to get lost in all the details of the tabernacle. It’s easy to wonder why God cares so much about the furnishings of the place where He will dwell. It’s tempting to project on God our own issues of greed, jealousy, envy, etc. (Why does God need all the gold and opulence?) Sometimes we even take the step of placing ourselves in judgment over God as we question His motives, doubt His intentions, and challenge His authority. But then we have to take a step back and remember who it is we are talking about. We are talking about the same God who created everything listed in that atheist’s tweet above. So perhaps His ways are higher than our ways? Perhaps His thoughts are higher than our thoughts? Perhaps He is under no obligation to explain Himself to us? Perhaps He doesn’t answer to us? Perhaps He is so far above and beyond us and we should remember our place?

Sally McFague once defined sin as a “refusal to remain in our place.” We aspire to be gods. We aspire to be like God. We refuse to stay in the role of a servant. We refuse to remain in our place as God’s instruments of blessing in this world. We want more. We want it all. We want to reign and rule and exercise our own dominion over all God has made. In our pride, we believe we should be the masters of our own destinies and the captains of our own souls. In our ignorance, we believe we have the right and the standing to challenge God on His terms. We are fools.

What’s the answer? Humility. Submission. Giving God the worship He deserves and the worship He demands. Trusting God’s character. Knowledge. Wisdom. Understanding. Ultimately, it’s about knowing our role. Staying in our lane. Remaining in our place. As we do that, we find incredible freedom. Perfect peace. Surpassing joy. All because we are embracing the role God designed us to play within the context of His larger creative purposes.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 1-4

February 20, 2020
SURVIVING LEVITICUS

Readings for today: [Leviticus 1-4](#)

Today is our first day in Leviticus. One of the hardest books for Christians to read and stay engaged with in the Bible. And yet, if we are willing to put in the work, we'll learn some amazing things about God's relationship with His people.

The first thing we need to understand as we approach this book is that much of what it talks about has to do with the different kinds of law that governed Israel. There were the ceremonial laws. Laws governing sacrifice. Laws governing worship. Laws governing what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean. Most of these laws were fulfilled once and for all by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. (In fact, all of the sacrifices we'll read about in Leviticus foreshadow the sacrifice of the Messiah.) Because the ceremonial laws were fulfilled, Christians no longer are required to keep them. Another set of laws contained in Leviticus had to do with the national life of Israel. Taxation. Property. Commerce. That kind of thing. Because those laws were tailored to the theocratic rule of ancient Israel, they are no longer binding on Christians today. Because the bulk of Leviticus has to do with ceremonial and national laws, it is tempting to dismiss the book as some antiquated piece of history not worth our time. That would be a mistake! For embedded in this book are important tenets of what we call the "moral" law which IS still instructive and binding on us today. The key is to know which is which and how to discern between the three types of law.

The second thing we need to remember as we approach this book is where it falls in the narrative. The people have just been saved from Egypt. They are standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai. God is still speaking to Moses. And the burning question that is on everyone's minds is this...How can a holy God dwell with an unholy people? If God is literally going to live among them, how will they survive? The answer is sacrifice. The first seven chapters of this book describe in great detail the sacrifices that were necessary to purify the people. Animal sacrifices. Bulls. Sheep. Goats. Birds. Grain offerings. Always with oil and salt. Peace offerings. Sin offerings. Blood being thrown against the altar. Animals dissected into little pieces. It must have been hard and fairly gruesome work. The fires must have burned continually. The smoke from the sacrifices rising into the heavens in a continual stream. (It must have smelled like Greeley...all the time! How that's pleasing to the Lord, I'll never know!)

What's the point of it all? To remind us every hour of every day that the penalty for our sin is death. To remind us that as bad as the stench of sacrifice may be, the stench of our sin is much, much worse. The reality is we don't take our sin seriously enough. We don't take God's holiness seriously enough. We like to think we aren't all that bad. The baseline for many of us is that we're pretty good people. Flawed? Yes. Imperfect? Sure. Sinner? Okay. Antiquated term but we'll go with it. God sees us - absent Christ - much differently. He sees creatures utterly deformed by their sin. Barely resembling the glory He initially created in them. He sees creatures living in complete and total rebellion against His perfect will. Creatures who are so full of selfish, prideful ambition and deceit. He sees creatures who are enslaved. Under bondage. Creatures with a terminal illness. Weak and emaciated by their sin. When He looks down from heaven on the earth, all He sees is death. Decay. Destruction. Our lives are a shell of what He intended. And for Him to enter into this world. Dwell with His people. In the perfection of His holiness and glory is to risk destroying them utterly. For God is a consuming fire. (Deut. 4:24) So God institutes the sacrificial system in order to give God's people an opportunity to purify themselves so they may live their lives before the Lord without fear. And because the sacrifices are animals, they have to be repeated with regularity in order to maintain the people's purity before God.

All this changes with the coming of Jesus. All this changes when Jesus - the perfect sacrifice - goes to the cross. Once and for all, He satisfies God's holy justice. Once and for all, He purifies God's people. Once and for all, He pays the penalty for the people's sin. I love how the Book of Hebrews puts it, "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant." (Heb. 9:11-15)

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 5-7

February 21, 2020
GRAVITY

Readings for today: [Leviticus 5-7](#)

Gravity. It's the force that holds all things together. It's the attraction between two bodies. It's what keeps our feet on the ground. It's what holds the planets in orbit around the sun. The more massive an object, the stronger it's gravitational pull. Now think about God. He is the most massive being in the universe. He is the creator. The author. The sustainer of all things. As powerful as our sun is sitting at the center of our solar system. Keeping planets in their orbit. Extending it's will throughout the galaxy. It simply cannot compare to God. God holds the universe together. God holds every star. Every planet. Every comet. Every living thing. All of it in the palm of His hand.

What does any of this have to do with the sacrifices we're reading about in Leviticus? I'm glad you asked! :-) Just as God designed our solar system with the sun at its center, so God designs human life with Himself at the center. Everything we say and do should revolve around God. Everything we say and do should be oriented around God. Everything we say and do should flow from God. The Exodus from Egypt represented a new birth for Israel. Before God delivered them, they had no identity. No national consciousness. No idea who they were and - more importantly - whose they were. They were lost. Wandering. A nation without a god. But then God saves them. Rescues them. Baptizes them as His people in the Red Sea. Provides for them like newborns with manna and water in the desert. And now He begins to teach them His way of life. He begins to show them what life looks like when it revolves around Him. It's a life of worship. A life of sacrifice. A life of almost daily covenant renewal. It's a life designed to exert a gravitational pull on their hearts so they feel constantly drawn back to Him.

Sin offerings. Grain offerings. Peace offerings. Guilt offerings. The fires at the Temple would have been burning day and night. The smell would have drifted over the entire camp. The reminder that everything Israel possessed belonged to the Lord. Everything they had achieved was made possible by God. They had been bought with a price. They had been purchased. God had set His love upon them and they were now His chosen people. As such, their entire way of life would now revolve around Him. No detail would be too small to escape His notice.

The same is true for us. Just as the planets in our solar system revolve around the sun so our lives are designed by God to revolve around His Son. Christ exerts a will and a force all His own. He pulls us into His orbit. He refuses to let us go. Once He's captured us, we cannot escape. And this is a good thing! We were not made to be the center of our own little worlds. We were not designed to carry the weight of a god. We are not strong enough. We are not wise enough. Left to our own devices, we will spin out of orbit and drift aimlessly through life like a rock drifting aimlessly through space. Sure, we may have some fun along the way. Sure, we may do some good things. We may make somewhat of an impact. After all, our lives do exert some measure of gravitational pull on those around us. But we will not find the peace we all long for. We will not experience the depth of love we were made for. We will not share the joy God intends for us to experience. Not without Him at the center.

Christianity is as much a way of life as it is a belief system. Centering your life on Christ requires the practice of certain spiritual disciplines that will orient and re-orient your heart every single day. Just as the Israelites brought sacrifices to God, so we should bring sacrifices of praise. Daily. Weekly. Annually. This is why spending time with God each day is essential. Worshipping with God's people each week a must. Celebrating the great feasts of our faith on Easter and Christmas vitally important as we seek to remain in Christ's orbit. Frankly, it's why we feel that pull on our hearts. That tug on our souls. It's not guilt that drives us to worship God. It's His Spirit. Calling to us. Reaching out for us. Exerting a gravitational pull on our lives to draw us in.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 8-10

February 22, 2020
STRANGE FIRE

Readings for today: [Leviticus 8-10](#)

I love this quote from Annie Dillard. “On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?” I tend to agree. We do not have any appreciation for the sheer power and utter holiness of the One we approach Sunday after Sunday. We treat Him far too casually. We get far too wrapped up in musical preference, liturgical style, the personality of the preacher, or “getting something out of the sermon.”

Worship for the Israelites was a dangerous proposition. Not because God is capricious or reckless or mentally unstable. But because God is holy. Pure. Dwelling eternally in unapproachable light and glory. His presence is a consuming, purifying fire. It separates gold from dross, wheat from chaff, clean from unclean by its very nature. It’s a double-edged sword. Piercing to the deepest recesses of our souls and joints and marrow. Cutting away all that is rotten and septic within us. Every time we invoke His name. Every time we enter His presence. Every time we come before Him in worship, we are literally entering the Most Holy Place. And this is why Dillard challenges us to become more aware of our surroundings. More aware of gulf that exists between an unholy people and a Holy God. More aware of the nature of the One we approach and to take the necessary precautions when we come to worship.

The Israelites knew all this, of course. But even they could become far too casual about worship. “Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.” (Lev. 10:1-3) I cannot imagine watching my children die in worship. I cannot imagine watching them burn to death before the Lord. I cannot imagine the fear and anger and frustration I would feel. But then again, I have not seen God face to face. I’ve not had to endure His fiery presence. I’ve not felt the fear the Israelites experienced when they approached God in His sanctuary. Christ, thankfully, saves me from His righteous wrath. Christ, thankfully, turns aside the Father’s burning anger and takes it on Himself. Christ, thankfully, satisfies all the demands of God’s justice and because of His shed blood, I am made pure. I am made clean. I am made holy. Aaron and his sons had none of these benefits. They had to tread very carefully in the presence of God. They had to perform their duties with devotion and carefully do all God commanded.

We do not understand the nature of sin. We tend to think of sin in rational terms. Errors in judgment. Honest mistakes. Poor choices. Leviticus uses completely different categories. Sin is impure. Unclean. Unholy. It is rotten. Decaying. Festering. Decomposing. Corruption. In order to really grasp the nature of sin, we have to leave the rational behind and think in Biblical terms. The other day, my children took our dog on a walk. Along the way, he found the corpse of a rabbit that had been dead a while. He naturally grabbed it and my kids were disgusted. How many of us have been hiking in the mountains and have come upon the worm-filled, decomposing corpse of some animal and been similarly repulsed? I think of the clean up work we did in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the smell of rot and decay we had to put up with as we gutted homes and cleaned out refrigerators. It was nasty work that made us routinely gag. That’s the stench of sin and it’s why sacrifices had to be burned continually before the Lord.

How seriously do you take your sin? How seriously do you take your thoughts, attitudes, and actions before the Lord? How seriously do you take your worship? Do you take Christ's sacrifice for granted? Are you, as the Book of Hebrews warns, "sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth?" If so, hear very clearly these sobering words, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume..." (Heb. 10:26-27) We will never be perfect, of course. But to continue to sin deliberately. To continue to pursue a lifestyle that offends God. To continue to refuse to give God the glory and honor He deserves is to wallow in filth. It's to "trample underfoot the Son of God and profane the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified and outrage the Spirit of grace." (Heb. 10:29) And this, my friends, is a dangerous thing. Just ask Nadab and Abihu.

February 24, 2020
THE MIRACLE OF HEALING

Readings for today: [Leviticus 11-14](#)

One of humanity's deepest fears is disease. Pestilence. Plague. Something unseen that steals life. We've all felt it. We've all struggled with it. If not personally then with those we love. Unseen proteins build up in the brain, robbing us of our memory. Unseen plaque builds up in our arteries, causing our hearts to fail. Unseen blood clots break loose, laying us low with a stroke. Unseen cells go haywire and we've got cancer.

I think of the rising anxiety and panic in the gay community in the early 1980's as a mysterious disease began appear in different clusters around Los Angeles, New York City, and San Francisco. A new epidemic had been born that seemingly attacked the human immune system. As gay men began to die in ever-increasing numbers, the reaction was tragic. Preachers called it God's judgment on immorality. The government put quarantines in place and began stopping the infected at the border. Those exposed to the disease were isolated and ostracized as our society gave into her homophobic instincts. Thankfully, there were many who fought their fear and took action. Raising awareness and funds for research. Lobbying the government to institute more humane public policy. Developing more effective treatments that allowed those with the disease to live relatively normal lives and put an end to the stigma that isolated them from society.

More recently, consider the H1N1 scare a few years back. This one hit us personally. One of our twins contracted it when she was four years old. The doctors told us to keep her hydrated and at home. The health clinics and hospitals didn't want the infection spreading so they asked people to be cautious and treat themselves. I remember watching my daughter get sicker and sicker and finally took her to our doctor and demanded she be seen. She was admitted to the hospital with life-threatening double pneumonia. Ugh. Now, I don't blame our doctors or healthcare professionals for what happened and thankfully our daughter made a full recovery. However, the fear that almost kept her from getting the care she needed continues to this day. Just look at the current global response to the coronavirus. There is something primordial about our fear of disease.

The ancient Israelites were no different. They too struggled with all kinds of anxiety over disease. They feared what they could not see. What they could not understand. They had firsthand experience watching a plague burn through an entire village. They knew what could happen should disease be left unchecked. So they were meticulous. When someone's skin erupted, they were sent to the priest. When someone's home showed signs of mildew or rot, they were quick to respond. When mold started to grow on clothing, they wasted no time. Please note the goal was never to marginalize the sick. Never to tear down a home or burn a garment. The hope was always to restore. To trust God for healing and provision. However, there were times when extreme measures had to be taken to protect the rest of the village or community.

Thankfully we live in a time where medical miracles have become the norm. Modern medicine. Surgical techniques. Treatment options. These are signs of God's Kingdom breaking into our world. It is part of the dominion God originally intended for human beings. We were designed to be healers. To care for all creation. To mend that which is torn. To restore that which is ruined. To make the broken whole. This is why so much of Jesus' own ministry was one of healing. One of restoration. One of purifying the unclean. God desires that all should be saved and salvation impacts the whole person. God desires our healing from disease. Our healing from isolation and loneliness. Our healing from marginalization and ostracism. Yes, such healing may not come this side of heaven but it is always what God is working towards. It is what we should be working towards as well. This is the heart that beats behind the words of Leviticus.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 15-18

February 25, 2020
SEXUAL PURITY

Readings for today: [Leviticus 15-18](#)

Today's reading includes a very important section on sexual purity. These regulations will sound somewhat foreign and somewhat familiar to our ears as they have provided the foundation for the Western legal system for centuries. Incest, bestiality, adultery, and homosexuality are all considered "abominations" before the Lord. Engaging in such activity comes with a heavy price. One would be cut off from his or her people. "Vomited" out of the Promised Land.

We struggle to understand this section of Scripture. Some dismiss it as ceremonial law much like the restrictions on what we can eat or wear. The problem with that approach is that we do affirm such things as bestiality and incest as abhorrent practices even in our time. Some argue these passages are culturally bound. Their argument is that such regulations were designed just for ancient Israel and therefore have no bearing on how we regulate our sexual activity today. Proponents of this argument believe in the primacy of love. As long as two people love one another, to deny them sexual fulfillment is cruel and harsh. Therefore, even adultery is justifiable in most cases as are same-sex relationships. The problem with this approach is that it misunderstands the nature of love. It trades on the erotic almost exclusively and dismisses any notion that sexuality and holiness are inextricably linked. A final argument is made - particularly from our LGBTQ Christian friends - that the authors of Leviticus didn't understand the nature of same-sex attraction and had no experience with loving, committed, monogamous same-sex relationships. This argument asserts that same-sex relationships in the ancient world were always exploitative, oppressive, violent, etc. and therefore the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 do not apply to a 21st century context. The problem with this approach is it simply is not true. Pioneers in Queer Studies like Louis Crompton and New Testament scholars like William Loader (neither of whom are evangelical Christians and both of whom affirm same-sex relationships) are among many who have demonstrated that loving, non-exploitative, same-sex relationships have existed since antiquity. The reality is the Bible is univocal in its condemnation of any sexual expression outside of marriage between a man and a woman and to claim otherwise is not being honest.

So what's the big deal about sex? Is God a prude? Is He simply trying to squash our natural desires and affections? We can't help how we feel, right? The key is to remember the context. You and I are born in sin. Our bodies. Our minds. Our hearts. All are warped and broken. This includes our sexual desires. We are "naturally" going to want to rebel against God's will. We are "naturally" going to want to pursue unholiness. Our hearts are bent towards evil and corruption and this prevents us from being able to enter into God's presence. And God wants to dwell with us! God wants to be with us! So God commands us to "be holy as He is holy" and this call covers every area of our lives, including our sexuality. Sexuality is not an end in itself. It is a powerful drive created by God for the main purpose of the procreation of our species as well as to give physical expression to the kind of "oneness" God desires men and women to have in this life. The joining together of man and woman in sexual intimacy within the context of the covenant of marriage is literally designed to give us a foretaste of the joy and freedom and transparency we will enjoy with one another in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why sex is such a powerful drive within us. And it is why God has placed such strong boundaries around it's expression. To keep us safe sexually. To keep our sexual lives pure and free from corruption so we can experience all God has for us.

All one has to do is look around our culture today to see the consequences of unfettered sexual freedom. Sexually transmitted disease. Sexual abuse and assault. Unwanted pregnancies. The

objectification of the female and male bodies. Rampant divorce and infidelity. The breakdown of families. Depression and anxiety and fear surrounding every potential sexual encounter and/or its aftermath. It's heartbreaking. God's desire is for us to repent and commit ourselves to holiness. Holy sexuality is expressed in celibacy in singleness and intimacy in marriage between a man and a woman. I realize taking a traditional, Biblical position on sexuality in our world today will draw scorn and even accusations of bigotry. However, I believe when one takes a step back and looks objectively at the empirical data surrounding the consequences of pursuing a sexual ethic divorced from the Bible, one can easily conclude God probably knows better. We would do well to trust Him in this area of our lives and submit our sexuality to His Will as revealed in His Word.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 19-22

February 26, 2020
LIFE TOGETHER

Readings for today: [Leviticus 19-22](#)

Raise your hand if you knew the Golden Rule came from Leviticus? Now repent because you broke the 8th Commandment! :-) Most associate the Golden Rule with Jesus and rightfully so. After all, Jesus repeats it as part of His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 7:12) However, very few people realize that God first enshrined this rule in law in Leviticus. Lost in all the conversation about sacrifices and priestly garments and what one should eat or wear is this beautiful picture of community life in Leviticus 19:9-18.

We see God's heart for the poor and less fortunate..."When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."

We see God's concern for honesty and transparency..."You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord."

We see God's compassion, especially for the less abled in our midst..."You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord."

We see God's desire for justice and righteousness and truth..."You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord."

And finally, we see God's admonition against hate, anger, rage, contempt, and most of all, vengeance..."You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

This are massively applicable in our world today! Could you imagine a community of people who sought to put these into practice? On a daily basis? Who gave generously? Dealt honestly? Showed compassion? Fought for truth? Laid aside anger and rage and malice and hate in the name of love? Hopefully you can! It's called the Church! Now I know no church is perfect. After all, it's full of imperfect sinners like me who struggle to keep God's law faithfully. However, as we seek God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we can expect to see some of these same behaviors break loose in our lives! We can expect to bear this kind of fruit for the Kingdom! And as brothers and sisters called into community together, we can make a HUGE difference in the world today! That's the call! That's the challenge! That was God's plan for Israel and it's still God's plan for His people today!

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 23-25

February 27, 2020
SPEED BUMPS

Readings for today: [Leviticus 23-25](#)

We had some neighbors over for dinner a few years back. A young couple with two young children. We had a delightful time getting to know them. We laughed. We shared. We ate good food. Our kids played well together. But in the course of our conversation they let us know they had NEVER been over to another person's house for dinner. Crazy, right? So we started asking them about their lives. The husband travelled almost 300 days a year for work. The wife woke up early every morning to take her daughter to softball training. Dropped her son off at before care at his school. Went back to get her daughter to take her to school. Went to her job. Had her parents pick up both kids after school. Dropped by her parent's house to get the kids on her way home from work around 6 pm. Took them to their softball and baseball practices respectively. Tried to grab a quick bite to eat and some quick snatches of conversation along the way with her kids. Finally got home around 9 pm every night. This was their life in some form seven days a week. 52 weeks a year. Occasionally, they would get a vacation here and there but always in and around their kids' sports schedules. It was brutal. Unsurprisingly, they didn't make it. They got divorced about a year later.

Sadly, this is normal life for a lot of people. They work hard. They play hard. They drive their kids hard. They barely get enough sleep. Barely get enough to eat. Barely get enough time together. Their relationships fracture. Their friendships are non-existent. They suffer from anxiety and depression. But rather than slow down. Rather than pump the brakes on life. They medicate. They act out sexually. They crash and burn. It's heartbreaking.

Contrast this way of life with God's ways in Leviticus 23. Sabbath. One day out of every seven where we refrain from work. One day out of every seven where we slow down. Focus on worship. Focus on each other. Focus on the relationships that are most important. Passover. An annual celebration intentionally focused on the salvation of God. Firstfruits. An annual celebration intentionally focused on God's abundant provision. Weeks. An annual celebration of God's revelation of Himself to His people through His Word. Trumpets. Another celebration of God's provision at harvest time. Day of Atonement. One day set aside each year for national and individual confession and repentance of sin. Booths. An annual celebration designed to remind God's people of their utter dependence on God as they wandered in the wilderness. Taken together, these weekly and annual feasts serve to slow God's people down. They act as spiritual speed bumps in life. They remind us life is more than what we produce. Life is more than what we achieve. Life does not depend on us and our strength and our willpower. Life is God's. He gives. He takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Friends, we must face reality. The American way of life is killing us. Literally. It is bad for our mental, physical, and emotional health. We were not built for the pace we're trying to keep. We were not designed for the race we're trying to run. We were not created for the life we're trying to live. We were made for a different world. A different life. An eternal existence. Something so deep and meaningful and purposeful, the garlands of this world come off withered by comparison. In the face of all God has planned for us, the trophies of this world lose their shine. As the old hymn says so well, "the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 26-Numbers 2

February 28, 2020
THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Readings for today: [Leviticus 26-Numbers 2](#)

You've just finished Leviticus! Congratulations! Way to go! It's one of the hardest books in all the Bible to get through! But you persevered! You pushed through! Even if you are a little behind, you're going to make it! Well done!

One big question a lot of folks are afraid to ask is this...what is the purpose behind all these laws? Or big picture, what is the purpose behind God's Law? The late, great R.C. Sproul described it this way...

"The first purpose of the law is to be a mirror. On the one hand, the law of God reflects and mirrors the perfect righteousness of God. The law tells us much about who God is. Perhaps more important, the law illuminates human sinfulness. Augustine wrote, "The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace." The law highlights our weakness so that we might seek the strength found in Christ. Here the law acts as a severe schoolmaster who drives us to Christ.

A second purpose for the law is the restraint of evil. The law, in and of itself, cannot change human hearts. It can, however, serve to protect the righteous from the unjust. Calvin says this purpose is "by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice." The law allows for a limited measure of justice on this earth, until the last judgment is realized.

The third purpose of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God. As born-again children of God, the law enlightens us as to what is pleasing to our Father, whom we seek to serve. The Christian delights in the law as God Himself delights in it. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). This is the highest function of the law, to serve as an instrument for the people of God to give Him honor and glory."

We see these three purposes at work in Leviticus 26. In verses 1-13, God clearly lays out the blessings of obedience. If God's people will live in a way that is pleasing to God, they will bring Him honor and glory. God will dwell with them and walk with them. And they will be blessed. This is the third purpose of the Law. Then, in verses 14-39, God clearly lays out what will happen if God's people don't follow His Law. God Himself will become their adversary. He will fight against them. He will walk contrary to them in wrath and fury. He will punish them. They will suffer. This is the second purpose of the Law which is to restrain evil. Finally, in verses 40-46, we see the first purpose of the law come into play. Repentance. The reality is God's people will not be able to fulfill God's Holy Law and this is by design. It's to teach us that righteousness and holiness are beyond us. It's to bring us to our knees in what I call "holy despair." It's to drive us to the end of ourselves. Our strength. Our ability. Our self-sufficiency. So we get to a place where we cry out to God for mercy and grace! We look to Christ to take our place! We glorify Christ for doing what we could not! We surrender to Christ and exchange His righteousness for our own. It's a beautiful exchange!

So here's the most important question as you finish Leviticus...do you find yourself resenting the Law of God? Dismissing the Law of God? Or do you find yourself overwhelmed by a deep sense of inadequacy before the Lord? If it's the former, I would encourage you to go to prayer and ask God to soften your heart towards Him. If it's the latter, be encouraged that you are drawing ever closer to Christ and He stands ready to take your place!

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 3-5

February 29, 2020
CREATION MANDATE

Readings for today: [Numbers 3-5](#)

The first command given to human beings in the Bible comes from Genesis 1:28. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Human beings were set up by God to serve as His priests and priestesses over all creation. To serve as His instruments of blessing and glory in the world. They were given His image and called to bear that image into all the earth. Essentially, they were called to lead all of creation in worship and praise of the Living God. As they cared for and cultivated and nurtured all God had made, each living thing would live in peace and harmony with one another and with the One who had created them. I love how the Westminster Confession puts it, “Human being’s chief end is to worship God and enjoy Him forever.” And I would simply add we are not just to do this for ourselves but to lead all God has made to this same chief end.

Fast forward several generations. Past the Fall. Past the Flood. Past the call of Abram and Sarai. Past the Exodus. Now God’s people stand on the cusp of the Promised Land. And God is revealing Himself to them once again. Reminding them of His claim on their lives. Reminding them of the role He has called them to play. It is so easy to read through Numbers and get lost in the weeds. Lost in all the genealogies and details over how many silver plates and how many animals to bring to sacrifice. But if one pauses and takes a step back, one can see how God has fulfilled His original command. Israel has been fruitful. Israel has multiplied. Israel is filling the earth. Israel is beginning to exercise dominion. It’s remarkable! In fact, it’s miraculous what God has done. From one family, He is filling the earth. From one promised son, He has brought many descendants. They truly outnumber the stars and the sands on the seashore. Out of brokenness, God has brought redemption. Out of slavery, God has brought freedom. Out of despair, God has brought hope.

Why would God do all these things? Because God remains committed to His original mandate. God’s great desire is to fill the earth with His glory. He will have the worship He deserves and the worship He demands. So He sends us - His people - out to the ends of the earth. To bear His image. To bear His likeness. To give the world a picture of what life looks like in the Kingdom. He sends us out to fulfill our original calling. To serve as priests and priestesses for the world. To lead the earth and all that is in it - every living creature - in praise of the One who created us. God wants us to enjoy Him! God wants us to delight in Him! God wants us to treasure Him above all else! This is why we were created. This is why we were called. This is why we were saved. To declare His praises among the nations.

Friends, how are you fulfilling your priestly calling? Do you intercede in prayer regularly for those God has put in your life? Do you encourage them and lift them up? Do you lead them to worship God in spirit and in truth? Do you invite them into a relationship with Jesus Christ? And how are you cultivating your own relationship with God? Do you delight in Him? Do you enjoy being in His presence? Do you seek His face? Do you believe God wants to make you fruitful? Multiply your influence? Send you out to proclaim His gospel to all the earth? Give you dominion over all He has placed in your care? It’s a sacred trust. The implications are enormous. It means everything you do carries eternal weight and significance. God wants to use you right where He has you for His glory in the world. Believe this! And trust His grace to see you through!