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February 1, 2022
The Danger of Self-Justification

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

Father, probe the depths of my heart. Reveal to me where I seek to justify myself before you or stand on my own righteousness. Help me to see the helplessness of my spiritual condition not so that I will despair but so that I will all the more praise You for what You've done for me in Jesus Christ.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be.” I remember running across this quote when life was at its darkest and I was struggling to understand what had happened. The people I worked for lacked integrity. They treated me poorly. They were purposefully deceitful and evasive and lacked transparency. Furthermore, one of them made it his mission in life to not only undermine the work I was doing but took every chance he could to speak ill of me. Accuse me. Spread false rumors about me. To top it all off, these folks were Christians! They worked for the denomination I was part of at the time! It was brutal and it drove me to the point of despair. But then I read these words from Spurgeon and I realized that as badly as I was being treated, I deserved far worse. All of the things I was being accused of WERE actually happening in my heart. I was angry. I was frustrated. I was prideful and arrogant. I harbored resentment and bitterness. I refused to forgive and extend grace. When it hit me that I was all these things and more, I almost laughed out loud. It dawned on me that all my pent up emotions and feelings were just a cover for my own insecurity and fear. And once I confessed those insecurities and fears to God, I was set free. Free from the need to justify myself. Free from the need to be right. Free from the need to see justice done. Free from the need to please them and gain their approval. It was a life-changing experience for me.

Job’s friends are an easy target in this book. Their theological purity brings little comfort to their suffering friend. Furthermore, their beliefs are far too simplistic. We all know the righteous are not always rewarded nor are the wicked always punished. So their attacks on Job are without warrant. Having said that...here’s a mind-bender for you...Job actually believes the same way they do! Listen to what he says, “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth.” (Job 29:14-17) The reality is Job believes his cause is 100% just. He believes he’s done nothing to deserve his fate. Because he is a righteous man, he cannot imagine why God would allow these things to happen to him. “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) Essentially Job is making the same argument his friends have made throughout the book. Why does God not reward the righteous and punish the wicked? Job clearly believes He should. Clearly is angry that He doesn’t! Job holds fast to his integrity. He has not committed any sin worthy of his suffering. He even goes as far as recounting all his righteous deeds in chapter 31. Making his closing argument before God.

As readers, I am sure we find ourselves sympathizing with Job. Taking his side. We’re convinced. The verdict is clear! Job must be in the right! But then...if we’re careful to listen...we hear the soft whisper of Satan’s initial question. “Does Job fear God for no reason?” The honest truth is Job DOES expect something from God. He expects an answer. He expects a justifiable reason for his suffering. Job

believes he's kept his end of the deal so by implication it must be God who has failed. (Important note: Job never actually says this...his faith refuses to let him go there.)

So let me put the question to all of us again...do we fear God for no reason? What are our expectations? Do we believe we deserve a guaranteed pass to heaven? Health? Wealth? Blessings in this life and the next? Or is God enough? Do we love God simply because He's God? If there were no eternal rewards. If there were no promises. If God never gave us a single thing, would He be worthy of our love and devotion?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 33-36

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February 2, 2022
Redemptive Suffering

Readings for today: Job 33-36

Father, suffering is hard to endure and even harder to understand. It's hard to me to wrap my head and heart around all the pain I see. Help me not so much to understand as much as to trust in Your promise that You will use all things for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purpose.

"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 and sisters, 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 or 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 seems to be piling on. Repeating the same 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. 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 allows and even uses the suffering of the righteous in order to purify and to save.

"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..." (Job 33:12-15) 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, Elihu argues, it was 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." (Job 33:17-18) 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 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 heart.

God not only warns us in dreams and visions and through His Word, he also allows and 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." (Job 33:19-22) 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.'" (Job 33:23-30) 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 believed throughout the centuries. Martyrs facing 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. Not only bringing about His will and His glory but also continuing to sanctify and purify even their 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 all need to be humbled and indeed one day will be humbled before the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is one of the most important lessons from the Book of Job.

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

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February 3, 2022
God Speaks

Readings for today: Job 37-40:1-5, Psalm 19

Father, help me to slow down. To quiet down. To rid myself of all distractions so that I might hear Your voice. You are speaking, am I listening? Am I ready to hear what You want me to hear? Ready to receive the message You have for me? Ready to obey the call You place on my life for today?

Many years ago, I worked at Boulder Community Hospital. I had just graduated from college. Just gotten married. Needed a job. So I applied to be a per diem Admissions clerk with the hope I could catch on full-time. After coming back from my honeymoon, several people had quit in the department and they offered me a position. A few weeks later, I got back from a friend's wedding and the lead person in the department had quit so they asked me to take that position. A few months after that, my manager walked out the door and they asked me to take that position. It was quite the whirlwind! I was 23 years old and running a department of 12-15 employees without any management or healthcare experience. Over the next year, three more departments were added to my plate and I ended up with about 50 employees reporting to me and I was the youngest manager by a decade or more. Then my director left. As they searched for a new one, I was invited into meetings to represent the business side of the hospital and offer my perspective as the person running all the frontline services. I still remember the last meeting I attended. I was pretty proud of myself at this point and I naturally had an opinion about everything. So I was in a meeting where we are discussing the launch of our nationally renowned sports medicine clinic. The executive director who I believe held both an MD and an MBA was talking about revenue streams and development plans and the entire leadership of the hospital was present. The president and the five vice presidents. All the directors and several members of the board. I was by far the youngest and lowest on the totem poll. Again, the only reason I was there was because the director position above me was still vacant. Right in the middle of the presentation, I interrupted to make what I thought was an important point. I attempted to correct the executive director in front of everyone. All eyes turned to me and I'll never forget his words, "Who the hell are you and why are you even here? If we want your opinion, we'll ask. Otherwise keep your mouth shut and stop wasting our time." I wanted to disappear. Unfortunately, the meeting lasted another hour and I had to just sit there in my embarrassment. Afterwards, my vice president came to me and let me know I wouldn't be attending any more meetings. ;-)

It was the worst moment of my life and yet it was the best moment as well. I learned humility the hard way. I learned about role clarity within an organization and how to know your place in the pecking order. I had no business being in a meeting of that magnitude much less speaking up. I had no understanding of the big picture. I had no appreciation for all the different factors in play. I was ignorant and clueless. Just like Job. In chapter 38, God finally answers Job from the whirlwind. He questions him over and over again. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" "Have you commanded the morning?" "Have you entered the springs of the sea?" "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?" "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds?" Job answers the way any of us would. The way any of us should when we come face to face with the majesty and might of God. "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)

What is the main message of Job? God is God and we are not. We are not like Him. We cannot understand Him. We cannot begin to grasp the height and depth and breadth of His ways. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. He sees things we cannot see. He knows things we cannot

know. He hears things we cannot hear. To contend with God is utter folly for His ways are unsearchable. Who are we to question God? Who are we to call God to account? Who are we to demand anything from God? He keeps His own counsel. He does not need our advice. He does not ask our permission. Theologian Sally McFague once defined sin as “our refusal to accept our place.” It’s an unwillingness to embrace our role. It’s the prideful belief that we can be more or should be more or deserve more than what we have or what we have received. This was the original temptation, of course. Eat the fruit and you will be like God. You will know good and evil like Him. You will see what He sees. You will understand what He understands.

We still fall for it, don’t we? I know I do. Despite the humbling experience at BCH all those years ago, I still find myself struggling to accept the role God’s defined for my life. I have this insatiable appetite for more. In my pride, I think I can achieve more. Accomplish more. Do more. All for God’s Kingdom, of course, but if I’m totally honest, it’s for me as well. So I’ve made a commitment in my life. I will walk with open hands before the Lord. Whatever He wants to place in my hands, I will accept. What He does not place in my hands, I will not seek. If He wants to raise me up, I will embrace the challenge. If He wants to lay me low, I will humbly accept His will. This is what it means for me to humble myself before the Lord.

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

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February 4, 2022

Limits

Readings for today: Job 40:6-42:17, Psalm 29

Father, like yesterday, I want to learn to accept my place. Embrace my role. Understand my limits. In my pride, I tell myself I can do anything. But the reality is I am weak. I am finite. I am limited in so many ways. My limits too often lead to disappointment. But Father, you set these limits so that I might seek You. You create these limits that I might learn to depend on You. It is only through weakness that I discover the sufficiency of Your grace.

One of the versions of the Bible that I love to read, especially when it comes to poetry, is the Message. The translator, Eugene Peterson, has this way of making the text come alive for me. Listen to how He translates some of these final verses of Job...

“Look at the land beast, Behemoth. I created him as well as you. Grazing on grass, docile as a cow— Just look at the strength of his back, the powerful muscles of his belly. His tail sways like a cedar in the wind; his huge legs are like beech trees. His skeleton is made of steel, every bone in his body hard as steel. Most magnificent of all my creatures, but I still lead him around like a lamb! The grass-covered hills serve him meals, while field mice frolic in his shadow...And when the river rages he doesn’t budge, stolid and unperturbed even when the Jordan goes wild. But you’d never want him for a pet— you’d never be able to housebreak him!” (Job 40:15-24)

“Or can you pull in the sea beast, Leviathan, with a fly rod and stuff him in your creel? Can you lasso him with a rope, or snag him with an anchor? Will he beg you over and over for mercy, or flatter you with flowery speech? Will he apply for a job with you to run errands and serve you the rest of your life? Will you play with him as if he were a pet goldfish? Will you make him the mascot of the neighborhood children?...What hope would you have with such a creature? Why, one look at him would do you in! If you can’t hold your own against his glowering visage, how, then, do you expect to stand up to me? Who could confront me and get by with it? I’m in charge of all this—I run this universe!” (Job 41:1-11)

One of the reasons we read the Word of God is to be reminded of our place in this world. Reminded of how truly weak and finite and limited we are as human beings. You see, the reality is we too often act like we CAN tame Behemoth! We foolishly believe we can hook the Leviathan! We believe deep in our bones that nothing’s impossible for us as long as we set our best minds and best resources and best efforts towards a single goal. Remember what we read in Genesis 11 about the Tower of Babel? “And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” (Genesis 11:6 ESV) We fundamentally believe - in our pride and arrogance - that we can ascend to heaven. We don’t need God. We can tame the world. Whether on a global, local, or even individual scale.

The Bible reminds us of our limits. It reminds of the boundaries of our existence. They are good. They are right. They are important. So many people read Job and are frustrated that he gets no straight answer from God. But in expecting or even demanding such an answer, we make the same mistake Job made. We put God in the wrong. We condemn Him so that we may be in the right. (Job 40:8) Would that we learn to respond to God like Job did at the end. Repenting in dust and ashes before the Lord. Only then can we expect the Lord to restore our fortunes, heal our land, revive our nation.

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 1-4

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February 5, 2022
Unsung Heroines

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

Father, so often it is the simple acts of faith that require the most courage. It is stuff of day to day living that makes the most impact. It is the ordinary decisions that bear the most extraordinary results. Help me to see every moment, every minute, every conversation, every person as pregnant with divine potential.

The Exodus story is one of the most powerful in human history. It is the great national narrative of the Jewish people. It brought hope to millions of African-Americans living under slavery and later, segregation in the Deep South. It inspired some of our greatest music, creating a whole new genre called “negro spirituals” that we continue to sing to this day. Artists, authors, and movie producers have all found it compelling. And it continues to galvanize those who suffer in captivity and bondage around the world.

It's easy as we dive in to focus on Moses. His miraculous deliverance at birth. His attempt to deliver his people by murdering an Egyptian. His flight from Egypt. His encounter with God at the burning bush. And then his return back to his people as he takes up the mantle of leadership. Often overlooked is the courageous faith of the ordinary women who make all this possible.

First, the midwives. Shiphrah and Puah are two of the most underrated heroes in the Bible. Their faithfulness to God placed them in incredible danger and yet they refused to obey Pharaoh's command. “But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.” (Ex. 1:17) Their actions saved who knows how many children in Israel and God honored their faithfulness. “So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.” (Exodus 1:20-21) As an aside, I've heard many Christians question how God could honor their deceit since they lied to Pharaoh. This clearly betrays a lack of understanding of what it takes to survive in such a situation. Most who question have never experienced the brutalities of slavery, bondage, and oppression. They are unfamiliar with work-gangs, hard labor, and cruel task-masters who whip and abuse. The more we seek to understand the harsh circumstances they lived in every day, the more we can appreciate their bravery.

Second, the older sister. When Moses was born, his mother hid him for three months. But eventually the time came where she had to let him go. She placed him in a little basket-boat on the Nile, probably with the hope that somehow, somehow his life would be preserved. His older sister followed the boat as it floated down the river. When she saw Pharaoh's daughter discover the basket, she immediately ran up to offer to help. Again, this is an incredible act of courage. For all she knew Pharaoh's daughter would drown her little brother right then and there and perhaps that is exactly what would have happened except for her swift actions. “Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." (Exodus 2:7-10) Not only does she save Moses but she is able to reunite him with his mother while he is being nursed! It's an incredible act of faith for such a young girl!

Third, Pharaoh's daughter. I've always wondered why she rescued Moses from the river? What motivated her to lift him out of the little basket and adopt him as her own? Did she the same thing in Moses that his mother saw? "The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child..." (Exodus 2:2) Or did she just take pity on a helpless baby? No matter her motivations, she too was acting courageously. Defying her father's orders to save this Hebrew child. Though she did not know God, she still was used by God to play a specific role in His salvation plan for His people.

It's amazing to think about, isn't it? The string of events that led to Moses appearing before God at the burning bush? It makes me think about my own life. What simple, yet courageous acts of faith am I being called to engage in that will further the Kingdom of God in this world?

Readings for tomorrow: None

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February 7, 2022
Getting to Know God

Readings for today: Exodus 5-9

Too often I make the mistake of reading Scripture through 21st century eyes. I subconsciously assume the people I read about in the Bible think like I do. But not only is there a massive cultural gap between 21st century America with our ideals of freedom and liberty and justice and fairness and ancient Egypt where Pharaoh was worshipped as a god but I also have to remember I live post-resurrection. I've been blessed to see the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The ancient Hebrews did not have this benefit. They did not yet know this God. They had no Bible. There were no Ten Commandments at this point in history. They had not yet appeared before Him at Mt. Sinai. They did not know how to worship Him. Furthermore, they had no real national identity. They had no land. No leadership. They were slaves. At best, they were a collection of loosely related people with a common ancestor and some stories about a God who once spoke to them.

In the ancient near eastern world, Egypt was the dominant power. Pharaoh was literally the most powerful man on earth. As such, he did not consider himself to be a man like any other man. He ruled with absolute authority. He held the power of life and death in his hands. His domain stretched for thousands of miles in every direction. He was wealthy beyond belief. His armies were feared. He truly believed he was divine. He truly believed the peoples of the earth existed to serve his needs and his purposes. So it comes as no surprise when Moses approaches him with a demand from Yahweh to let the Hebrews go that Pharaoh would have laughed. "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." (Exodus 5:2) For all Pharaoh knew, this Yahweh was just another small-time, tribal god who had no power. After all, Yahweh had allowed His people to become slaves for hundreds of years. He was not a god to be respected, much less feared.

The Exodus story has so many layers and we make much of the drama between Pharaoh and Moses. But the real story is the conflict between Pharaoh and Yahweh. Yahweh is using Pharaoh as an instrument to reveal His true glory to the world. He says as much in Exodus 9:13-16, "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." The Apostle Paul underscores this same idea in Romans 9:14-18, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 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." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." The reality is God is not going to relent with Pharaoh until he reaches a place of complete and total submission. God will not stop with the plagues until Pharaoh is completely broken and grasps the difference between himself and Yahweh, the Lord of the Universe. So plague after plague after plague rains down. The people of Egypt suffer. Their lands and livestock are largely destroyed. Fear begins to permeate the land as the Egyptians realize that the god they've come face to face with is no tribal deity! He is Yahweh! He is the Lord! He is God!

By the way, God isn't just revealing Himself to the Egyptians, He is re-introducing Himself to His people. He is reminding them who He is. He is teaching them about Himself. "Say therefore to the people of Israel, '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) After four hundred years of silence, God is once again on the move. He is fulfilling His promises in His time.

Now some may ask why God waited so long? What about the people who don't get to experience the miracle of the Exodus? What about those who had lived and died under the lash of the Egyptians? Here we come face to face with the fact that our God is no tribal god. His primary purpose is not to meet our needs. It's not to make sure we remain safe and happy and live a blessed life. No, God has a greater plan in mind and that is to reveal His glory to the world. This is why God delivered His people. To show forth His power and glory to the world. To leave no doubt as to who is God and who is not.

So the question then comes to us...will we believe this God? Will we trust this God? Will we worship this God? Will we harden our hearts like Pharaoh? Will we cling to our pride and continue to act like "little gods?" Or perhaps our spirits are broken by the pain we've suffered in this world. Perhaps belief is beyond us because of how beaten down we feel. Will we pray the prayer Thomas prayed, "Lord, help my unbelief?" Will we trust Christ above even our own thoughts, feelings, and fears?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 10-13

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Readings for today: Exodus 10-13

Every year when I get to this point in my Bible reading, I struggle with the same thing. God hardening Pharaoh's heart. When I read those words, they don't feel good. They don't sound right. It doesn't seem fair. Was Pharaoh given no choice? It's one of the deepest mysteries in all of Scripture. So as we begin to wrestle with this concept, we need to 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, and God loving everyone. 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. That may be a new thought to you. It was to me when I first read through the Bible. As important as my salvation is to God, it is merely the "means" God choose to us 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. None of us are innocent. None of us are free. 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

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February 9, 2022
No Whining

Readings for today: Exodus 14-18

Years ago, I made a commitment to myself. I would do my best never to whine. Never to complain. This commitment came as a result of some work I was doing among the global poor. After seeing the conditions so many people live in around the world, I was overwhelmed by the blessings God has poured into my life. My life is rich and full. Yes, it is stressful at times. Yes, it can be demanding. But the challenges I face are nothing in comparison to what so many of my dear friends have to face on a daily basis. This commitment really isn't all that new. I've never been a big fan of whining. Just ask my kids. They will tell you one of my "hot buttons" is whining. It spins me up. It lights my fuse. I am not sure why. Perhaps it's because of how I was raised. Perhaps it's because of how hard I've had to work my entire life. Perhaps it's because of the difficulties I've had to face and overcome. It's such a tender spot for me that every time I read Exodus, I find myself getting a little frustrated, even angry, with God's people. They complain ALL THE TIME!

"They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." (Ex. 14:11-12)

"And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" (Ex. 15:24)

"And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Ex. 16:2-3)

"Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Ex. 17:2-3)

These are the same people who literally watched God part the Red Sea! Literally watched God fight for them against the Egyptians! Literally watched God rain manna and quail down from heaven! Literally watched God bring water from a rock! How can they not believe? This year, God has given me some fresh insight. Rather than focus on all the whining and complaining, I am instead focusing on the provision of God. Over and over again, He responds not with anger but with blessing.

"The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen...Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses." (Ex. 14:15-18, 30-31)

“And Moses cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.” (Ex. 15:25-26)

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not...And the Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’” (Ex. 16:4, 11-12)

“And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink...” (Ex. 17:5-6)

It really is remarkable when you stop to think about it. God meeting the needs of His people over and over again. And while it's extremely difficult to discern the tone of God's voice as He speaks, I imagine it is sometimes tender. Sometimes stern. Sometimes there's probably an edge to it and other times God is deeply compassionate. The point of it all is that God is revealing Himself as a loving Father who is teaching His children to know Him and love Him and depend on Him for all they need in this world. So God tests them. He challenges them. And as they experience His salvation - deliverance through the Red Sea...Egyptians and Amalekites destroyed...manna every day...quail every night...water from rocks...purified water from a bitter spring - this is how God raises His children. Even to this day.

So back to whining. If I'm honest, I'm a whiner as well. I do complain a lot. Deep down in my heart, I struggle all the time with frustrations and fears. Failures and uncertainty. I have these longings that go unfulfilled. I have these needs that go unmet. I often feel like I deserve more. Like I'm entitled because of all the hard work I've put in. All these emotions lie below the surface if I am totally transparent and how does God respond? He puts me to the test. He places me in situations where I have no choice but to cry out to Him. Why? Because He's teaching me every single day what it means to be His child. To grow into His likeness and image. To become the man He's created and called me to be.

Readings for tomorrow: 19-21

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February 10, 2022
Meeting God

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

I try to imagine myself at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Coming face to face with the glory and power of God. Thunder. Lightning. Smoke. Fire. Clouds descending on the summit. It must have been an awe-inspiring sight. And then to hear the first words of God. Words of such grace. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Before we get to any of the laws and commandments and rules for living, we learn about relationship. This God is our God. This God delivered us from bondage and oppression. This God set us free from slavery. Remember the Israelites didn't really know this God. They hadn't really spent any time with Him. All they had were a few stories handed down over generations. Now God is giving them a new story. Now God is forming them into a new people. Now God is renewing the covenant He first made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and further defining the relationship He will have with them.

I remember when I first met God. I too had been raised on the stories of God. Stories that had been passed down over the centuries. Stories in Sunday School. Stories from my parents. Stories of God's faithfulness and God's goodness. But then I came face to face with God on the campus of the University of Colorado in Boulder. Walking on the sidewalk one day reflecting on the Bible study I had attended the night before and suddenly feeling overwhelmed by God's presence. Realizing for the first time in my life that Jesus was not just some story but an actual Person who wanted to have a relationship with me! On that day, Jesus gave me a new story. He adopted me into His family. He renewed the covenant and further defined the relationship He desired to have with me. My life has never been the same.

Today's reading represents a hinge point in the Book of Exodus. We move from sweeping epic to Israelite case law and it's tempting 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. Ha! However, if we slow down and read carefully, some wonderful truths are revealed. The laws God gives reveal His nature and character. 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, lying, 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.

The same is true for us today, friends. The church of Jesus Christ – made up of Jews and Gentiles together – is still being called to be the light of the world. The salt of the earth. As we lean into Christ, God's law is written on our hearts and we become a new people. May the town of Parker, the wider Metro Denver community, and even the world see what life looks like in God's Kingdom as they look to us!

Readings for tomorrow: 22-24

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February 11, 2022
Divine Principles

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

Someone recently asked a great question, “If God were to come down and speak to us today, would his laws be the same or changed for the current day?” The laws we read about in Exodus, or later in Leviticus, definitely seem foreign and strange to us. They have to do with the customs of the ancient near east and while they represent in many cases significant advances in human rights for the time, we don’t often see them as such because of how far human civilization has advanced.

One key to answering this question can be found in the difference between Exodus 20:1 and 20:22. In Exodus 20:1, God gives the Ten Commandments. They are written on stone tablets by his very finger. They are words directly from the mouth of God. However, in Exodus 20:22, a shift takes place. Now Moses will become the lawgiver. He will be the one to flesh out the details of the laws that will govern the daily life of Israel. It’s one of the main reasons the people of God historically have kept the Ten Commandments but not necessarily kept all the laws of Moses as they are written.

A second key to answering this question is pushing beyond the letter of the law itself to the principles they represent. This is where our study of these laws becomes fruitful even in our 21st century American context. For example, it’s worth considering the dignity the Hebrews assigned to slaves, women, children, and families. Again, for their day, these were utterly unique among ancient law codes and represent a trajectory towards our understanding of modern human rights. Consider as well the laws of proportional justice which limit revenge by making the punishment fit the crime. This principle still undergirds much of our modern legal system today. The principle of restitution is another one we understand and practice. As is God’s concern for widows, orphans, and the poor.

At the same time, there are clear areas where we struggle to implement the principles God’s given us in His law. Consider our current national struggle with immigration and refugees. I know these are somewhat separate issues legally but what does our reading from Exodus today have to say about the principles that should shape our policies in these areas? Consider the following verses, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 22:21) “You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 23:9) “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.” (Ex. 23:12) God makes it very clear to His people that they should treat the immigrants and refugees in their midst with compassion and mercy and kindness and care. Why? Because this is how God treated them when they were immigrants and refugees in Egypt. Now what would that look like in our context? It’s a worthy debate full of all sorts of complexity. But what’s not complex is God’s call for compassion. To treat those seeking asylum with dignity and honor because they are fellow human beings made in the image of God. Doing all we can to keep families together for example and come alongside them and care for them even as we work through the legal processes governing immigration in our modern world.

What’s the fundamental point? The most important truth that undergirds the entire law of God is this idea that we should treat one another as we have been treated by God Himself. We should extend to others the same kindness, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness that God has shown us. We should deal with one another righteously not just because “God said so” but because God DID so with us! This is

what it means to keep and follow God's law and it's something Jesus Himself will affirm in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) which, by the way, is simply a restatement of the Ten Commandments.

Readings for tomorrow: 25-28

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February 12, 2022
Tabernacle

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

Today we read about the construction of the Tabernacle and it's easy to get lost in all the talk of cubits and curtain loops. It's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture when we're reading about the construction of lamp stands and the ark of the covenant. But if we take a step back and survey the scene, what we realize is that God is literally giving Israel a portable temple! The Tabernacle is God's fifth wheel! It will be His home on earth. His dwelling place among His people. Wherever they go, He will be with them! Wherever they find themselves, God will be there. They will have the opportunity to meet with Him. Hear His voice. Worship at His feet. "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst...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." (Ex. 25:8, 22)

One of the many things I love about the Christian faith is that it's not bound to any particular time or place. Our God is no simple tribal god. He rules the universe. He reigns over all He has made. The earth is His and the fullness thereof. We don't have to "go anywhere" to meet with God because He makes sure to "tabernacle" with us. This is what the Apostle John means when he writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) The Greek word for "dwelt" means "tabernacled" which means Jesus Himself is now the tabernacle of God! Jesus is Immanuel - God with us - no matter where we go or where we find ourselves. Through the Holy Spirit, He lives in our hearts which means we are never, ever alone and that's good news, amen? Because it's not good for us to be alone.

Friends, the most important thing to remember as you wade through all the blueprints and construction details of these chapters is that they are reflection of God's love. A demonstration of His commitment to you and to me and to His people down throughout the ages. He will be our God. We will be His people. He will not let us suffer in our sin forever. He will not let death have the victory. He will unite all things in Himself. He will bring all things together. He will bring all people together! He is at work even now in our hearts. Making Himself known to us. Making Himself known through us. God is just as present here on earth as He is in heaven. Embrace Him. Let His presence fill your heart and soul with hope.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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February 14, 2022
CHIEF OF SINNERS

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

I remember my ordination process. It began when I was in college. It involved a lot of study. Attending seminary. Meeting with a committee from my denomination on an annual basis. Written and verbal ordination exams. It was fraught with challenges. Some of those challenges were human and sinful. I was part of a fairly progressive denomination at the time and there were certain people who did not approve of my evangelical faith and tried to make life as hard as possible on me. One of them even attempted to delay my ordination by layering in requirements that were unconstitutional. I was forced to appeal to the highest ecclesiastical court to get them overturned. It was crazy. Then there were my own failures that held me back. My poor performance in college became a barrier to being accepted into seminary. I had to do some remedial work to get in. My insecurities created tension in the process. My pride often got in the way as I struggled to prove myself. I wanted so bad to show everyone I belonged. This summer I will celebrate twenty years of ordained ministry and perhaps the biggest thing I've learned as I look back is that I'm simply the chief of sinners. I am not any more or less holy than anyone else. I am no different than anyone else. I am simply one beggar called to tell other beggars where to find bread.

The very first thing that happens after the priests are ordained in Exodus 29 is a sin offering. It's a recognition that though Aaron and his sons are being set apart, they are no more holy than anyone else. No less in need of the grace of God than anyone else. They are not to stand above the people they serve as if they exist on a higher plane but rather they must be the first to confess their sins. The first to be cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice. The first to consecrate themselves to the Lord. Blood is put on the tips of their ears, the thumbs of their hands, and the big toes of their feet to remind them they are accountable for all they say and do. They have been set apart to serve God and His people. Set apart to honor God with all their lives. Set apart to give the people of Israel living, breathing examples of what it means to live a life of faithfulness before the Lord. And this is not a point of pride but one of humility. Their lives are no longer their own. Their choices are no longer their own. Their time is no longer their own. Their resources are no longer their own. All that they have is God's to use as He sees fit.

One of the questions I get asked the most is "why do you call yourself one of the pastors here at PEPC?" You never introduce yourself as senior pastor. You never allow your students to call you professor. You never use your title of "Reverend Doctor." You rarely tell people you went to Princeton. Aren't you proud of what you've accomplished? Of course I am. Don't you believe you've earned the right to such titles by your hard work? I guess I have. So why not embrace your pastoral credentials and authority? Honestly, it's because every day I am reminded of how deeply inadequate I am. Every day I am reminded of how desperately sinful I am. Every day I am reminded that I am simply a clay jar, a cracked pot, into which God has graciously chosen to deposit the treasure of the gospel. As John Newton once put it, "I am a great sinner but Christ is a great Savior." Serving Him is reward enough. I have no need for titles or accolades or trophies on a shelf. I simply want to spend my life preaching the gospel and then be forgotten.

What about you? What work has God "ordained" you to do in His Kingdom? How has He set you apart and have you humbly embraced His calling on your life?

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 33-36

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February 15, 2022
THE NAME OF THE LORD

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

My greatest desire as a pastor is for the people I serve to come to know and love and serve Christ. It's often the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning. It's often the last thing I think about when I go to bed in the evening. My heart breaks when I see those I love wander from the faith. My heart sings when I see those same wanderers come back home. There's nothing better than praying with someone to accept Christ. There's nothing worse than having that person later tell you they've abandoned their faith. Being given a front row seat to the spiritual growth of an individual is the greatest privilege of my life. Sitting in that same seat and watching someone slowly let their relationship with Christ grow cold is my greatest sorrow. So I can sympathize with Moses. I get the challenge he faces as a leader for God's people. And I understand his heartfelt request to see God's glory. It's often been my prayer as well.

The importance of these chapters in the Book of Exodus cannot be overstated. God is renewing His commitment to Israel. He is revealing more of Himself to His people. He gives them His name. He shares with them His divine nature and character. He makes His plan known to them. Despite their sin. Despite their rebellion. He has determined to be their God. He has determined to do something miraculous in and through them that will stun the nations of the earth. He will drive out their enemies. He will secure for them a homeland. He will do for them what has not been done for any other people. For they are set apart. Come hell or high water, they are His chosen ones. I feel the same way about the church I serve. No matter how far we fall. No matter how often we fail. God will never stop being our God and we will never stop being His people.

This is again why I love Moses' question. Sometimes leaders need their own hearts renewed. Sometimes leaders need their own doubts answered. Their own fears addressed. Their own anxieties eased. Like Moses, I often wonder if I am the right man for the job. I often wonder if I am making any difference at all in my work. I often wonder if I have what it takes to lead the church I serve into the future God has planned for her. So I find myself asking God frequently to show me His glory. Reveal to me where He is at work. Give me the eyes to see what the Spirit is doing so I can find the hope and the strength to keep leading and serving those I love.

"The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "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." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped." (Ex. 34:5-8)

From this point forward, whenever Israel is in trouble. Whenever Israel falls into sin. Whenever Israel suffers. Whenever they are oppressed and in need. They call on the "name of the Lord" and are delivered. They call on the "name of the Lord" knowing with full assurance that the Lord's name is mercy. Grace. Steadfast love. Faithfulness. They call on Him knowing He is slow to anger and keeps his steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love Him in return. They call on Him knowing He is just and will be no means give the guilty a pass. They call on Him, trusting Him to be true to Himself. True to how He revealed Himself to Moses. True to what He has declared about Himself. Over and over again, we will see these verses referenced throughout the Old Testament. Every

time the people of God call on the “name of the Lord” to be saved, they are looking back to this particular meeting where God showed Himself to Moses.

Friends, God has given us an even greater gift! He has revealed Himself to us in all His glory! In Jesus Christ, “we have seen His glory” (John 1:14) for He is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature....” (Hebrews 1:3) Every time we find ourselves in trouble. Every time we fall into sin. Whenever we suffer or endure hardship or pain. Whenever we are oppressed or in need. We too can call on the “name of the Lord!” The Name that is above all other names! We too can look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith! We know He is merciful and gracious. We know He is slow to anger and full of steadfast love. We know He is just and will by no means give the guilty a pass. In fact, He dies in order to deliver all of us from the penalty of our sin! Thanks be God! Be encouraged, friends! Lift up your hearts to the Lord! Look to Him and find your hope and strength renewed today!

Readings for tomorrow: Exodus 37-40

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February 16, 2022
Sacred, Ordinary Things

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

When I graduated from college, I had one mission. To become a pastor. I wanted to go to seminary. I wanted to get ordained. I wanted to serve a church. God had other plans. My grades from college were terrible. I flunked out after my sophomore year due to excessive drinking. When I became a Christian, my life turned around and I re-applied and got back in under probation. Though I did pretty well my last two years, the hole I dug for myself was deep so I graduated by the skin of my teeth. The chances of me getting into grad school were slim at best. Two weeks after graduation, I got married to the love of my life and our mentors advised us to wait at least a year before going off to school. Looking back, it was great advice but it didn't feel good in the moment. It felt like yet another barrier to me doing what I felt called to do. So I got a real job. I went to work for Boulder Community Hospital. I hired on as an admissions clerk, making \$7.75/hr. My wife and I rented an old, run-down apartment and did our best to make ends meet. Honestly, it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I learned the true meaning of Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

When we read the Bible, it's tempting to focus on the main characters. Guys like Moses. Women like Miriam. But what about the lesser known characters? Those entrusted with the more mundane aspects of Israel's life together? What can we learn from guys like Bezalel and Oholiab? They didn't see a burning bush. They didn't hear the voice of God. They didn't go up on the mountain with Moses. They were not warriors. They were not leaders. They were not among the seventy elders Moses called. They simply were two people with God-given talent and a passion for craftsmanship. Prior to building the Tabernacle, I imagine they spent most of their days in obscurity. Building carts. Repairing tents. Making clothes. The everyday, ordinary, mundane work required to sustain God's people on their journey to the Promised Land. Amazingly, their work caught the eye of God. You may recall back in Exodus 31, God said these words, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do." Because they had been faithful in the small things, God entrusted them with the most sacred work imaginable... building a home for God!

When I started at Boulder Community Hospital, I was per diem. I would only be called in when people were out sick or on vacation. Within a few weeks, several people in my department quit so I was asked to go full-time. Within another few weeks, the lead in my department quit and I was asked to take her position. Within six months, my manager resigned and I was asked to step into her shoes. Within a relatively short period of time, I was managing four departments and about 50 employees and I was all of 24 years old. I have no way to explain how this happened. I had no previous healthcare experience. I had never managed people before. My resume certainly didn't fit the responsibility I had been given.

The only way I can explain it is God. God filled me with His Spirit. He gave me ability and intelligence. He instilled in me through my parents a strong work ethic. He gave me a knack for working with people. And as I proved faithful in the small things like checking in patients day after day, He entrusted me with greater things like managing all of the “patient access” services.

Bezalel and Oholiab are quick to remind us that all of us have been gifted by God in some way and all of us are called to use our gifts for His glory. It’s not just pastors or missionaries who are the heroes. It is the people of God exercising the gifts God has given each of them for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ and the glory of God’s Kingdom. When we fail to exercise our gifts or diminish our gifts in any way, we lose out on at least part of what God has planned for us. Think about how impoverished we would be if there had never been a Bezalel or Oholiab? Think about the impact on the worshipping life of Israel if there were no craftsmen around to make all God had ordained? Now think about our life together. Think about our worship together. What gifts do you bring? Is it the gift of music? The gift of prayer? The gift of friendship? The gift of production? The gift of preaching? The gift of teaching? The gift of serving? If you are a Christian, you have the same Spirit of God filling you that filled Bezalel! This same Spirit imparts all the gifts and talents we need to worship and serve God as He demands. So how are you exercising your gift? How are you seeking to use your gift to build up others in your family? In your neighborhood? At work or school? In the church?

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 1-4

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February 17, 2022
Offering

Readings for today: Leviticus 1-4

One of the greatest gifts my parents ever gave me was to take me to church every Sunday. At their side, I learned to sing all the great hymns of our faith. I learned to recite the Apostle's Creed by heart. I memorized the Lord's Prayer and the liturgy of the Lord's Supper. It's funny the things you remember as a child. I remember fighting with my brothers over who got to sign in on the Fellowship Pad. (For those who don't know, the "Fellowship Pad" was a form used by a lot of churches at the time to take attendance.) I remember the tastelessness of the communion wafer and how I always wanted "seconds" when it came to the grape juice. Perhaps most of all, I remember my mom giving each of us a quarter so we could participate in the "offering" when the plate came down the pew. As a child, I have to admit I found the practice a bit confusing. Was God short of cash? Did He really need our money? Why did some people put in more and some less? Why did some not give at all? What happened to all the money? Where did it go? What did the church use it for? Why did we give when it seemed we didn't have enough for ourselves? (My family went through some very challenging economic times when I was young and yet mom always made sure to give.) Perhaps you've asked some of these same questions yourself?

Today we come to everyone's favorite book of the Bible...Leviticus. This is usually where well-intentioned Bible reading plans go to die. I often feel like I should post the warning sign Dante inscribed over the entrance to hell in his Divine Comedy, "Abandon all hope ye who enter here!" Indeed, it seems so many get lost in this book. The laws seem archaic at best. They deal with issues we have little connection with as 21st century Christians living in the wealthiest nation the world has ever seen. The cultural distance is extreme and difficult to overcome. The minutiae wears down even the most faithful reader. And yet, Leviticus is as much God's Word as the Gospels or the Pauline Epistles. The laws contained in this book are as divinely inspired as the red letters of the words of Jesus. Reading them devotionally helps shape our hearts as much as the language of the Psalms.

There are two keys principles to getting the most out of this book. First, keep in mind there are three different kinds of laws listed here. There are the ceremonial laws that governed worship. Sacrifices. Personal hygiene. Disease. Particularly focused on ritual purity, these laws were designed to create the conditions where holiness could flourish so the people could come before their Holy God without fear. Second, there are the civil laws that governed the nation of Israel. Tithing. Inheritance. Sentencing guidelines. These laws were necessary to maintain order in society, create revenue for the national government, and promote social welfare. Third, there is the moral law governing behavior. Exemplified by the Ten Commandments, these laws were designed to teach us righteousness and many of the laws governing violence, sexuality, lying, honoring parents, and Sabbath regulations were created to embed this moral law in everyday life. Taken together, the Levitical laws shaped a particular way of life for Israel that, in turn, shaped them into a particular, even peculiar, people.

For example, consider all the different "offerings" listed in the opening chapters. As you read through them, you might find yourself asking similar questions to the ones I mentioned above. Why does God need all these sacrifices? What kind of God would require such things? Is God hungry? Does He need something to eat? Is that why we offer our food back to Him? Is God vain or egotistical to demand such things? Why does God require us to impoverish ourselves on some level in order to appease Him? What point is God trying to make? The system of offerings set up by God was designed to deliver a singular message. Your life is not your own. All that you have is not yours to own or to do with as you

will. You are not an owner, you are a steward. Yes, God has entrusted you with a certain amount of talent, a certain amount of treasure, a certain amount of time, and a certain amount of responsibility. But to whom much is given, much is expected. And so He commands His people to appear before Him on a regular basis to offer back to God a portion of what He's entrusted to them so they never forget the One from whom all blessings flow.

Now fast forward a few thousand years. I am no longer a child but an adult and every week I am reminded in worship when we take an offering that my life is no longer my own. My gifts and talents are not my own. My wealth is not my own. My time is not my own. Nothing I have is mine to own. I am merely a steward and because God has given me much, He expects much. So I do my best to take what I have and offer it back to the Lord. My wife and I give significantly and sacrificially of our treasure. My wife and I give significantly and sacrificially of our time. My wife and I give significantly and sacrificially of our talent and God takes our meager offerings and multiplies them many times over for His purposes in the world.

Readings for tomorrow: 5-7

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February 18, 2022
The Big Picture

Readings for today: Leviticus 5-7

One of the biggest challenges for me when I read the Bible is to keep in mind the larger story. It's so easy for me to get stuck in the weeds especially when it comes to the laws of Leviticus or the statistics/genealogies in Numbers or the tragic stories in Judges. It's easy to lose sight of the big picture and how each of the books of the Bible ties together to illustrate a seamless whole.

The overarching narrative of the Bible takes place in four acts...

Act 1: Creation. God creating the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Everything is good. Everything is right. Everything is beautiful. Humanity reigns and rules with God over all He has made.

Act 2: Fall. Humanity rebels and decides to go it's own way. Sin enters the world. Creation falls into ruin. Death. Disease. Pain. Suffering. All become commonplace.

Act 3: Redemption. God doesn't abandon His creation. Out of love He reaches out in rescue. Deliverance. Salvation. The culmination of His plan is Christ who defeats Sin and Death once and for all on the cross.

Act 4: Glorification. The reunion of the heavens and the earth. The joining back together of the two spheres of life that were separated by the Fall. Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of this reality and His promise is that He will return one day to make all things new.

It's important to note that Acts 2 and 3 are running simultaneously throughout the Scriptures. From Genesis to Revelation, we see humanity rebel over and over against God. We also see God's grace on display as He relentlessly pursues those He loves. The sacrificial system instituted by Moses in Leviticus is one movement, if you will, within Act 3. It's not the final movement. Rather, it points beyond itself to the climax to come when Jesus will become the Perfect, Spotless Lamb. This entire system with it's different sacrifices and different offerings and specific instructions is given as a means to prepare God's people for Christ. To get them ready so they will recognize Him when He appears. It's a system designed to prepare the heart and soul for the culmination of God's redemptive purposes.

By reading and reflecting on Leviticus, we are reminded over and over again of the extreme penalty our sin deserves. Death seems to reign throughout this book. You can't turn around without stumbling over the carcasses of bulls, rams, sheep, goats, and turtledoves. The sacrificial fires would have burned day and night as the people of Israel - now numbering in the hundreds of thousands - came to make their offerings. The priests must have been exhausted from all the hard work of gutting and dressing and cleaning each animal. The smell would have permeated the camp. Again, all to remind God's people of the monumental effort it took to keep them holy before their God.

This should only deepen our appreciation for Christ. Fully God. Fully Man. As God, He is fully able to satisfy the justice of God for all sin for all time. As Man, He is able to truly represent us. Take our place. Become our substitute. In Christ, Act 3 comes to its glorious close! The Father making Him who knew no sin (Christ) to become sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God! (2 Cor. 5:21) Because of what He has done, no more sacrifices are required. No more blood needs to be

shed. We are made holy just as He is holy! This is the glory of the gospel which the Levitical sacrifices foreshadow.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 8-10

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February 19, 2022
Worship

Readings for today: Leviticus 8-10

I have this vivid memory of sitting in worship when I was a young teenager, goofing off with my best friend during the Lord's Prayer. An older member of the church turned around and confronted me. She looked me in the eye. She spoke in a calm but firm voice. She was deadly serious. "You are aware, young man, that we are in the presence of Almighty God." My friend was able to blow her off. I was not. I have no other words to describe what I felt in that moment other than the "fear of the Lord." For some reason I still cannot comprehend, I received that woman's rebuke with great seriousness. To this day, whenever I pray the Lord's Prayer, I find myself returning back to that balcony seat and feel the same fear come over me. To be clear, the fear I feel is not anxiety. It's holy reverence. It's awe and wonder. It's utmost love and respect and devotion for who God is. I wish I could go back and thank that woman for the gift she gave me that day. It was one of those moments that changed the trajectory of my life.

I thought about that woman when I read about the deaths of Nadab and Abihu today. 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 essentially what that older, wiser believer was challenging me on all those years ago. She wanted me to become more aware of the gulf that exists between an unholy people and a holy God. She wanted me to appreciate the character and nature of the God we worship and adore and not act flippantly or casually in His presence.

The Israelites knew all this, of course. And yet 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 true nature of our 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 one of our dogs 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, friends, is the stench of sin and it's why sacrifices had to burn continually before the Lord.

How seriously do you take your worship? How committed are you to gathering with God's people on the Lord's Day to bring Him the honor and glory He is due? When you enter into worship, do you come with an awareness that you are entering the presence of Almighty God? Entering into the Holy of Holies in heaven? When you sing the songs, pray the prayers, give your gifts, listen to the Word of God preached, and participate in the Sacraments; do you find yourself filled with reverence and awe at what God has done?

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February 21, 2022
Living Sacrifices

Readings for today: Leviticus 11-14

Confession time. I have leprosy. At least according to Leviticus 13. The leprosy referenced in our passage today isn't limited to Hansen's disease but could refer to a variety of conditions like psoriasis, scarlet fever, scabies, or atopic dermatitis. I've been fighting this last one for years. In periods of stress, my eczema flares up. I get these red patches of skin that are dry and itchy. Of course, the fact that I swim regularly doesn't help. ;-) If it's serious enough, I have to use steroid cream to get rid of it. It's not any fun and it would have potentially made me unclean back in ancient Israel. This is where Leviticus really starts to get challenging. Holy. Unholy. Clean. Unclean. Common. Polluted. The ancient Israelites assigned disease to a different category than we do today. They used lots of words we don't think about in our own context and culture. This begs for some explanation.

First, everything that is not defined as holy is understood as "common." Second, common things – like animals, plants, pots, homes, clothes, even people – are further divided into two groups which are labeled "clean" and "unclean." It's important to note here that "cleanness" is a state of being more than anything else. Clean things hold the potential to become holy things when they are sanctified. Unclean things cannot be sanctified and therefore cannot become holy. For example, if I come to present a lamb from my flock as an offering, it must be unblemished. It must not be diseased or old or disabled in some way. Blemished lambs are considered unclean, cannot be sanctified, and therefore are not suitable to offer as a sacrifice. The flip side is also true. Clean things can become unclean if they are polluted by touching something dead for example. Holy things can become defiled in the same manner which is why the proper rituals must be followed to the letter during the daily sacrifices.

But what about people, you ask? Great question! The baseline condition for humanity is "common" but the baseline condition for the people of Israel was "clean." They were set apart by God remember? Israel can become "unclean" through sin, disease, corruption, pollution, etc. Israel can also become holy by following the law of God and offering the right sacrifices. In fact, it was God's stated goal for His people to be holy even as He is holy. "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44-45)

Now here's the great news! In Christ, all of the ceremonial laws that sanctified God's people have been fulfilled. He is the perfect, "once for all" sacrifice. He is the unblemished Lamb offered on our behalf. His death atoned not just for our sins but for the sins of the entire world. (1 John 2:2) As a result, our baseline condition is no longer "common." It's no longer even "clean." It's holy. Pure. As such, we no longer need to worry about clean and unclean animals. We no longer need to fear being made unclean by disease or disability or coming into contact with the dead. Through His shed blood, Christ has not only washed us clean – in the Levitical sense – but sanctified us permanently!

So does this mean we no longer need to follow the law? Not at all. The call to personal holiness has not been set aside. God still calls us as His people to be set apart in thought, word, and deed. We are still called to "be holy as He is holy" and offer our lives as "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" according to Romans 12. Though the ceremonial obligations of the law have been fulfilled, the moral obligations remain in force. God still has expectations for His people. Sin is still serious and should not be treated casually. This is why Jesus spends a great deal of time talking about the heart in the Sermon

on the Mount and Paul spends a great deal of time on the ethical obligations of Christians in most of his letters. As Christians, we no longer need to undergo elaborate rituals to maintain a state of cleanliness or sanctification before the Lord but we should undergo regular examination and confession of our sin in light of the Word of God.

This is one of the reasons Christians have historically engaged in spiritual practices like the Daily Examen. First pioneered by Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, it is an intentional way to reflect on our day. We prayerfully ask God to reveal to us what in our day drew us closer to Him and what drew us away from Him. We think back on the actions, thoughts, and feelings we experienced during the day and we consciously “examen” them in light of the Word of God. We confess where our actions/thoughts/feelings fell short and we rejoice where our actions/thoughts/feelings reflected Christ. This is just one example of learning how to bring every thought captive to Christ and live for Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 15-18

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February 22, 2022
Sexual Purity

Readings for today: Leviticus 15-18

I remember seeing my first Playboy magazine when I was ten or eleven years old. I was with my cousins. They had a stack hidden in the play-set behind their house. As a young man just entering puberty, it created all kinds of feelings inside me that I had never felt before. Powerful emotions swept over me. Sexual urges I had no idea existed welled up inside. It became an addiction that plagued me through my college years. It also created all kinds of confusion. Subconsciously, I began to objectify women. Value them primarily as objects of sexual desire. Relationships became transactional and heavily tilted towards self-gratification. If my sexual needs were not met, I moved on. Sadly, my experience was not unique. It was very common in the circles I ran in at the time. For example, I remember serving as a camp counselor at a summer residential sports camp in Maine. The hookup culture was rampant as we spent weeks getting drunk at the local bar and sleeping with each other. It was the darkest summer of my life. Thankfully, things often are darkest before the dawn and the Lord intervened in my life in a miraculous way the following year at CU. From the moment I met Christ, I knew things had to change. I had to surrender my sexuality to Him just like every other part of my life.

Today's reading includes a very important section on sexual purity. These regulations may sound somewhat foreign and somewhat familiar depending on your experience. 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 affirm such things as bestiality and incest as abhorrent, illegal practices in our own time. Some argue these passages are culturally bound. Their argument is that these regulations were designed exclusively 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, denying them sexual fulfillment is perceived as cruel and harsh. Therefore, same-sex relationships are justified as is adultery in some instances. 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. 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 is simply not historically accurate. 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. No matter how you slice it, the Bible is clear. God seems univocal in His 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. Sin warps and corrupts every part of us, including our sexual desires. Therefore, we are "naturally" going to want to rebel against God's will. We are "naturally" going to want to pursue unholiness. Our

hearts are drawn so easily away from God and towards what is impure and unclean and this is what prevents us from entering God's presence. And yet 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 propagation 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 can be so amazing! And it is also why God has placed such strong boundaries around it's expression. To keep us safe. 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 desire. Sexually transmitted disease. Sexual abuse and assault. 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. After twenty-six years of faithful marriage to one woman, I certainly know this to be true in my own life.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 19-22

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February 23, 2022
The Golden Rule

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

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February 24, 2022
Sabbath

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

Sabbath. It is a core, foundational principle in Scripture. Hardwired into our system at creation so that we could find rest. One day out of every seven. One year out of every seven. One year out of every fifty set aside for rest. Set aside to honor God. Set aside for not only our rest but that of the land. Animals. Basically, all of creation. A pattern God Himself followed at creation. Six days God labored to make the universe and all that is in it and on the seventh day He rested.

We ignore this command at our peril. Not just because God commands it. This is no arbitrary rule God puts in place to test us. It's not divine busy work just to make sure we are listening. No. God has hardwired the human body for rest. Our best medical professionals will tell you the source of so much of the depression, anxiety, fear, and pain we suffer from is due to the stress of feeling like we have to work 24/7. We are being crushed under the weight of the burdens we carry. The responsibilities. The obligations we've taken on as a family and as individuals in our world. Social media only exacerbates this problem with its never-ending stream of connection. The reality is we were not built to be "on" all the time. 100% productivity is a goal that will kill us even if we are able to achieve it.

I remember seeing this play out when I worked as the Manager of Patient Access Services at Boulder Community Hospital. The stated goal of the Human Resources department was to get maximum productivity from each employee. They actually had an equation they followed to determine how much each employee was expected to produce. They kept our available workforce as lean as possible in order to achieve this goal. The result was a much higher number of sick days, lower quality of life in the workplace, and therefore, lower productivity. In their effort to achieve maximum efficiency, they lost sight of the very real human cost.

That was almost thirty years ago. Things have not gotten better. As a pastor, I watch as people try to squeeze 28 hours worth of work into a 24 hour time period. I see them running from dawn to dark, giving themselves barely any space to breathe. The result is broken marriages. Broken families. Broken lives. The Sabbath is designed to create a "speed bump" in our lives. To get us to slow down. To rest. To let God be God. It is perhaps the most tangible expression of our faith because it forces us to relinquish control over our lives. When I Sabbath, I am letting God back onto the throne of my life because I am specifically choosing NOT to produce anything. And that's a good thing. Even a godly thing. A major reason Israel lost the blessing of God was their failure to keep the Sabbath. We actually don't have any evidence they let the land rest every seven years. We certainly have no evidence they honored the Year of Jubilee. When you read the passages from today, it's important to sit back and ponder what life would look like if we really lived according to God's divine rhythm.

Readings for tomorrow: Leviticus 26-27, Numbers 1-2

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February 25, 2022
The Glory of God's Law

Readings for today: Leviticus 26-27, Numbers 1-2

Wow. Congratulations! You've just finished Leviticus! It is a significant accomplishment to make your way through one of the hardest books of the Bible. But you persevered. You pushed through. Even if you find yourself a little behind, you are going to make it! Well done! ;-)

One big question that a lot of people are afraid to ask about Leviticus 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. But perhaps more important, the law illuminates human sinfulness. As Augustine once 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." In other words, the Law of God highlights our innate weakness so that we might seek the strength found in Christ.

"A second purpose for the law is to restrain evil. The law, in and of itself, cannot change human hearts. It can, however, serve to protect the righteous from the unrighteous. John Calvin put it this way, "The Law, by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, curbs 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 human 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 divine 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. It's to bring us 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

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February 26, 2022
God's Treasured Possession

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

The title for this particular book of the Bible could not be more appropriate. The Book of Numbers is indeed “all about the numbers!” The number of warriors in Israel. The layout of the camp of Israel. The duties of the Levites. Even more specifically, the duties of Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. And then some more regulations regarding ritual purity, confession and repentance, and then a strange test for adultery. As was the case in Leviticus, the cultural distance between us and ancient Israel is vast so we have to take a step back and look at the big picture.

“Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the Lord.” (Num. 3:12-13)

Israel belonged to God. They were His chosen possession out of all the nations of the earth. He had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and thereby laid claim to their very lives. They were not their own. They were not “free” to choose or not choose God. He had chosen them. He had saved them. He had rescued them. He had made His covenant with them. No matter where they went or what they did or how they acted, they remained His children forever. In order to remind them of this great and awesome truth, God told Moses to set aside one entire tribe...the Levites. They would not be counted in the census. They would not be considered “part” of Israel. They would have no inheritance in the Promised Land. Their “inheritance” would be God Himself. They would be set aside to serve Him in His Tabernacle and, later, His Temple. They would play specific roles within the worshipping life of Israel. They would guard the sanctuary. They would set it up, tear it down, and transport it day after day. From birth they were set apart, consecrated to the Lord’s service. It was not a vocation they chose but a calling God had placed on their lives.

Fast forward a few thousand years. One greater than Moses is born. A high priest greater than Aaron has come. The Old Covenant is fulfilled. The New Covenant is established. “In speaking of a new covenant, Jesus makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Hebrews 8:13) The reality is the Old Covenant was always temporal. Always bound to a particular cultural situation. Always designed to point us to a new and better covenant which Jesus Himself would die and rise to guarantee. “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.” (Hebrews 7:22) The ceremonial laws of Israel were culturally bound to a particular time and place. To a particular situation in history. Even the moral law which remains binding serves only to show us our weakness and imperfections. Therefore, it is useless to save. “For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.” (Hebrews 7:18-19) Jesus is that better hope! And through His life, death, and resurrection, God once again lays claim to our lives. He chooses us. He redeems us. He purchases us with His own blood. And because He Himself is our eternal high priest, interceding for us continually in the heavens. Because He Himself is our eternal sacrifice, fully atoning for the weight of all our sin. “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him...” (Hebrews 7:25)

In Christ, we belong to God. We are His treasured possession. We are His chosen people. As such, we are not our own. Our lives are not our own. Our future is not our own. All that we have and all that we

are and all that we achieve is not ours to hold onto but rather ours to offer in service to God. How different would our lives be if we understood this great truth?

Readings for tomorrow: None

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February 28, 2022
Spiritual Unity

Readings for today: [Numbers 6-9](#)

What is it that brings people together? I have long pondered this question. I have been in settings where individuals from wildly different backgrounds almost miraculously find common ground. A maximum security prison where men who once belonged to rival gangs defined by racial hatred play side by side in a worship band. An African nation where one tribe attempted to exterminate the other find healing and reconciliation as they practice confession and forgiveness. A husband and wife, estranged for many years because of deep wounds, renew their vows and discover new intimacy as they humble themselves and make themselves vulnerable before each other. Sadly, I've seen the other side as well. Especially recently. Debates over COVID mandates. Political power struggles. Social strife. All have conspired to exacerbate our differences and tear us apart. None of these things are new. In fact, they are quite normal. Status quo for the human race. Throughout our history, we have demonstrated an almost limitless capacity for division. It's part and parcel of our fallen nature.

Perhaps that's why I love our reading today. Especially chapter seven. Yes, I know it's full of mind-numbing details like the weight of several silver plates, the number of gold dishes, and what seems like a herd of livestock but when one takes a step back to look at the big picture, what emerges is a beautiful picture of unity. Each of the twelve tribes of Israel coming before the Lord to make a sacrificial offering. Each of the twelve tribes doing their part to help consecrate the altar. Each of the twelve tribes sending their most respected leader to dedicate the best of what they have to God. It's a beautiful picture of what God's people can do when they come together with one heart and mind. And what happens? God honors their spiritual unity. He accepts their sacrifice. He descends from heaven to meet with them. "And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him." (Numbers 7:89)

What is it that drives such unity? Is it unanimity? I don't think so. The Book of Numbers is replete with story after story of rebellion and conflict and complaint. The people of God often find themselves at odds with each other, with Moses, and with God Himself. Is it because they are ethnically and culturally homogeneous? Not at all. Their identity as God's chosen people is still in its infancy. They are far more shaped by their experience of slavery and often exhibit a desire to return. They have yet to settle in the Promised Land. They have yet to establish themselves as a nation. So what is it? What is it that brings them together and motivates them to give so generously? The only answer is God. His faithfulness keeps them together when so many forces threaten to tear them apart. His steadfast, covenant love gives them a common identity and purpose. His holiness exposes all their impurities and His mercies – new every morning – cleanse them daily of their sin.

Now fast forward to our context. What is it that drives unity in our community? Is it our unanimity? Not at all. We are divided generationally, economically, ethnically, politically, culturally, socially, sexually, you name it. There are so many forces arrayed against us threatening to tear us apart. In my experience, the people of God are just as rebellious and prone to conflict and complaint as the people of Israel! Including me, by the way! So what is it that brings us together? The only answer is Jesus. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. Through His death and resurrection, He tears down every dividing wall of hostility that exists between us. He is faithful even when we are faithless. His unconditional love and grace shapes our identity and gives us purpose. His holiness exposes our sin and His shed blood cleanses us completely and utterly and for all eternity.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 10-13, Psalm 90

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