

READING NOTES – FEBRUARY

The One Year Bible (ESV)

FEBRUARY 1

Exodus 13:17-15:18

Exodus 13:17-22

Vs. 17-18 The Lord led Israel, and in a way that made no sense to the Egyptians or to anyone else.

What we should think about as disciples is when God leads us in a way that makes no sense to others, He has His reasons. Our confidence should be in following Him, not in knowing why or being able to explain why He seems to be leading us into a dead-end.

Vs. 21-22 Introduced here is the cloud and the pillar of fire which will be with them for another 40 years. Reading about these signs is so easy, but their significance defies our imaginations in several ways. First, how incredible it must have been to have these every day and night. They must have been huge. Second, how incredible to see these every day and yet not trust God. It makes the rebellion of the people very strange. God might be right. There might be something very wrong with all of us that defies all reason. Sin is incredible in its depth and power in us.

Exodus 14

Vs. 1-4 Notice how God is still coaching Moses. He is explaining, step by step, what is going to happen.

At the end of this document, there is a map of the possible route of the Exodus, from The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 253, that might help you to understand how God led them.

Beginning at Rameses, they went south and then up north. You can see the city of Migdol mentioned in v. 2. The Red Sea apparently was really the Reed Sea, that is today's Lake Ballah. I guess the words for "red" and "reed" are as similar in Hebrew as they are in English. The people were encamped facing across Lake Ballah toward Migdol. This must have given Pharaoh the confidence to act rashly, thinking the people were sheep lost in the wilderness.

Vs. 5-9 Pharaoh and his boys are mad. With a hardened heart, his foolishness is intensified to the point of complete irrationality. If they haven't beaten God yet, why do they think this is a good move? But now, the final step to Israel being without threat in the wilderness will be accomplished. With this next defeat, the Egyptian military will be reduced to a national police force just trying to rebuild and protect a ruined country.

Vs. 10-14 It is incredible to read these words from the people to Moses in light of all the acts of God's power they have seen. And then, there is that pillar of fire standing near them.

God says He will get glory from Pharaoh. When you read Romans 11, the issue of God "using" Pharaoh (and the unbelieving in general) comes up. And just to be fair, we all have a hard time imagining God twisting someone's mind to do His will without giving them a chance to believe. In all of what we understand and do not understand, all the conflicting thoughts of God's election, foreknowledge and our freewill will come together and will prove, as Paul says, "God's righteousness." In the angelic world God is in court and the accuser searches God's actions to see if He is playing according to the rules. I think this is why the angels attest to God's holiness. It's not because they're assigned this duty for our sake, (for great verses and great songs); but for them, and the issues at play in the angelic conflict, God's holiness and righteousness are important to them.

A key verse on this is Romans 9:22, *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?* So here is my thought. What if God, in His foreknowledge, knew that a child to be born would never accept Him in faith and would always be in rebellion? In God's vast wisdom and planning and foreknowledge, He could surely move events around that person and even use that person's responses to His purposes. Paul's point is that God would have a price to pay also, that is, enduring the rebellion of this person for 70 years. God could just "snuff him out." If you've been a school teacher or had a horrible tenant in a rental house, you'll know enduring this kind of rebellious person is not a delight. We think God can just "put this out of His mind," because He's in outer space or someplace, but I don't think so. God is here and I think sin seriously grieves God. We're just used to it.

Also, regarding freewill and God's ability to "direct" us, you wonder what rights we really have. For example, in a recent election, they did surveys on how different groups voted. There were the ethnic groups, and then gender groups and religious groups, but I never found one on how the prison population voted. I'm sure that would have been a substantial block of people, and it would be interesting to see what issues were important to them and, so, how they voted. Oh, that's right, they can't vote. They lost the right to vote because of their crimes. In all societies, those guilty of crimes lose rights and often their freedom. They have the basic rights (basic defined by the culture) but many freedoms are removed. We're "guilty" too, right?

Now, if you look at the entire scope of things biblically, that is, "in reality," our biggest foe is Satan, standing before God and proving, by what we do, that we deserve judgment and death. Whatever role Satan was supposed to have for good has been used by him for evil, giving him power when we mess up, like giving the board of directors the right to run the company because the true owner is in jail (and they put him there). Along with this, God had to save us, not violating any rules of righteousness and justice. Satan watches this. Yet God does have the right, since we are guilty before Him, to direct us and manage us just like you would direct people in prison who have lost their rights because of their crimes. For those who will never trust or obey Him, He is perfectly free to direct as He pleases. Look at Pharaoh, the wealthiest and most powerful man on earth at that time. All of that privilege was also from God. He hardened his own heart against God. He was already in rebellion, and that being the case, God made it worse and engineered Pharaoh's actions, as a guilty man, to lead to God's glory. Anyway, that's just my take on things.

Again, I wonder how the people of Israel could doubt God when there was a pillar of cloud/fire right there with them. Miracles do not make people believe. Sometimes they only expose the heart of unbelief.

Note that instead of crying out to the Lord, they go after Moses.

Vs. 15-18 This is an amazing event, and the lesson for us as disciples is to follow the Lord no matter what. God can deliver.

Notice again how God coaches Moses and assures him.

Vs. 19-20 Here the *angel of God*, in the cloud, went between the Egyptians and Israel. Notice too that it was dark on one side and gave light on the other. For an interesting note on the pillar and the *angel of God* (angel of the Lord), look at 1 Corinthians 10:4.

Vs. 21-31 People make a lot of the wind and the role it played as if to explain this by the wind. This was just a flat out miracle. God provided a wide path in the sea for at least 2 million people to cross (600,000 men plus women and children). The wind may have dried the surface, but if it was strong enough to push back the sea, it would have been strong enough to blow the people away.

Pharaoh was totally irrational in following. Not one of the soldiers survived. Egypt was ruined.

Exodus 15:1-18

If the people had had hearts of devotion to God, this would have been very meaningful. In that it was inspired by the Spirit, it shows great things about God. In many respects, this looks a lot like the kind of praise David expressed toward God.

Also, there is another group that will sing this song of Moses. They are found in Revelation 15. Can you see the connection between their situation and the event here and why it would be fitting for them to be singing this song?

V. 13 Notice the mention of God's *steadfast love*. That is much like David.

Vs. 14-16 The effect of this and everything that had happened in Egypt is that the nations feared the Lord. When the people get to Jericho forty years from now, that fear will still be present in Jericho.

Vs. 17-18 Again, in David's praise there is often the mention of God's presence and sanctuary and the Lord reigning forever.

This song is very heartfelt, I'm sure, but the people will soon forget all this and complain. Emotion is never the measure of true devotion and commitment to God. Being a disciple means giving up your life to follow Christ in the harvest. Following Christ has less to do with emotion than raw devotion, love and faith. I love emotion, but seeing this reaction of the people and seeing how much the church loves worship, but is allergic to reaching lost people, I don't put any weight on great bands and worship in church. I think we are conditioned to think that feeling gushy toward Jesus is the goal. Jesus says, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*" And below, there is a parable to this effect.

Matthew 21:23-46

Vs. 23-27 I remember reading this the first time and identifying with the irrational hardness of heart of the Pharisees. They were afraid to give a straight answer, weighing the options.

Vs. 28-32 This parable underscores Jesus' first principle of discipleship: obedience - not emotion, following - not talking. This was very true and you can imagine that the Pharisees were not happy with what Jesus said here.

Vs. 33-41 I've often thought that this entire scenario is irrational on the part of the people running the vineyard. Why would they get the land if they killed the heir? There is no rational reason. In the same way, when suppressing the truth is the goal, there is no rationality. We might see this on the part of unchurched people where it is pitiable and understandable. Where it hits us the hardest, as disciples, is when you see this kind of suppression and irrationality on the part of believers, churches and leaders. I have been in churches where there was no fruit, but rather a rigid, self-righteous guarding of the truth and church tradition. It was as if they knew nothing of the love of Christ and true mission of the bride. If Jesus had shown up, they probably would have opposed Him and thrown Him out.

V. 41 It is interesting to see that the Pharisees were totally engaged in the story and wanted to judge those tenants too.

Vs. 42-46 They realized that Jesus had spoken this against them. They were the tenants and were also fulfilling a part of the Old Testament prophecies. Interestingly, they didn't arrest Jesus because they, again, were weighing the options.

Psalm 26

As disciples, following our Savior in the harvest, can we bow our heads and say these words to Him with this sincerity and meaning?

Vs. 1-5 Isn't it interesting how similar this sounds to Psalm 1?

Vs. 6-8 These verses mention something important to David and to us, praising God and being close to Him. Whether we find it in a room or in a chair in a corner, I think it needs to be the constant yearning of a disciple to be close, confined, connected to Christ, quiet and alone, to enjoy His presence. As important as the harvest is, the strength of our hearts, what gives us the ability to withstand the conflict and pressure of this earth, is quietness with the Lord, with His Word, in prayer in that place where we meet Him.

Vs. 9-12 Again, David is crying out and sees his hope and confidence in the Lord.

Proverbs 6:16-19

So, as a disciple, which of these do you need to avoid? I found a couple.

FEBRUARY 2

Exodus 15:19-17:7

Exodus 15:19-27

Vs. 19-21 This section finishes off Moses' song from yesterday. It's sort of a grizzly picture. Meet Moses' sister, Miriam, leading the girls, singing on the banks of the Red Sea as the bodies of dead soldiers lap upon the shore. You definitely "had to be there" to appreciate the moment. It was a very class "A" miracle and deliverance. It is interesting to think of Miriam out there shaking a tambourine at 90, or thereabouts.

Vs. 22-27 This deliverance makes the next portion harder to grasp, but important to note. If God wanted to kill the people, He had the chance, but it is obvious that He wants to save them. Now, they have to go three days without water, and when they find it, it's undrinkable.

When we read "people," we have to realize this is a large city of people. If they had 600,000 men, then they had as many, if not more, women. Then, since they were a hearty and procreative people, what - 3.1 kids per family? We're talking 2-3 million people. Some people speculate that there may have been up to 6 million people. This is a lot of people to be thirsty and complaining. It also means that on the surface, their need for water is "impossible" to meet.

Note that their "need" overwhelms the miracle and deliverance at the sea. It blinds them to the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. This is a good lesson in why God allows us to have hard times and allows things to move slowly at times. The building of our faith, faith that goes above our needs and circumstances, that lifts us out of ourselves to live for "reality," is not an easy task. As disciples, it is very easy to forget, in the present distress, the wonder of God's grace we rejoiced in yesterday.

Notice that God allowed the need to grow....3 days, and then took care of the problem. The deliverance and miracle were magnified by the depth of need.

Notice, and you'll see this over and over, that instead of crying out to God, they go after Moses and bitterly blame him.

So, while they are enjoying this deliverance and drinking the water, God made a deal with them that seems like a "no-brainer." If they will do what He says, He'll take care of them. They have seen all sorts of stuff, miracles, water, and they have "their daily pillar of cloud/fire." Of course

they will obey and rest in Him and listen to Him and take all of their needs to Him, right?
Wrong.

Just a reminder for us disciples, it is hard to find seasoned, proven workers in Christ who do not fold under after a few weeks or months of personal need. That's why the process mentioned in Romans 5:1-5 is so important. What is also important is living before the Lord, meeting with Him daily. Past experience, just like food eaten last week, doesn't give us hope and strength today. Also, staying in the harvest is important. This is reality and the mission of God, and it keeps us from sinking into ourselves and our needs.

Exodus 16

Note that there are two important things established here.

Vs. 1-21 First, they were given the manna, a daily miracle. Two to three million people needed more to eat than the cattle they brought out of Egypt. I'm sure for the "far thinking" people in Israel this journey seemed suicidal. Where would you get that much food, every day? God did it for 40 years and didn't even break a sweat. It was the daily miracle that saved them, the fact that they gathered daily, that they took for granted, and one generation grew to despise. For the disciple, there are lessons to be learned in all of this about our hearts and the power of sin. Notice their words in v. 3. Cool! Read what Paul says about this generation of people in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 and how this account is meant to help us.

God occasionally gave them meat, but manna was the norm. Think also about what it says in The Lord's Prayer, *Give us each day our daily bread*. Also, in John 6, Jesus says He is the bread that comes down from heaven.

Vs. 22-30 Second, they were given the Sabbath. This was God's provision for them to rest and allow God to care for them. On the sixth day God would provide twice as much. They were to rely on God and not work to care for their lives. They could do good, help others, walk, talk, eat, but not work in order to store up stuff or take care of life. This is hard for someone in the affluent western world to grasp, that if you didn't work a day in that culture, you might not have anything to eat that night or the next day. We have Wal-Mart; they had their hands. God was giving them a weekly, cultural, personal reminder that He cared for them; and that, in reality, He, not they, sustained their lives.

Vs. 31-36 This was a memorial to God giving this bread from heaven. The people basically called manna, "What's this?" Notice that this editorial note must have been made by Moses just before he died, or by the writer of Joshua.

The giving of manna is important for us as disciples. Jesus mentioned again and again that His disciples had to live free from the anxieties of today and the meeting of their daily needs. If God could do that there, He can meet my needs today here. I need to seek, knock and ask in following my Lord in the harvest. He has shown He can provide.

Exodus 17:1-7

Vs. 1-7 Why do you think the Lord is showing us another instance of the people complaining against Moses and not asking Him? I think it's ironic that the area around Mt. Sin-ai was referred to as the wilderness of "Sin." Unfortunately, we disciples can also fall into this kind of behavior.

Notice v. 3. I wonder if they will always complain in v. 3 of every chapter.

Notice they go after Moses and it is Moses who cries out to God. Why didn't they see God in this? If the people would have humbled themselves and prayed to God, the water would have come. I always feel bad for pastors when I read this. This "striking of the rock" was used to establish the authority of Moses in the eyes of the elders and people. God told Moses to do it.

Later Moses will strike another rock when God tells him to do otherwise and will get in trouble. A disciple remains a disciple. We are never God and we need to obey just like everyone else.

But reading all of this, my heart goes out to Moses. What an incredible burden. He was prepared 40 years leading sheep in the wilderness, and now for another 40 years, he will lead these “sheep” in the wilderness. The daily strain of tending to this community must have been beyond all human endurance.

This is why, as disciples, we follow and live for Jesus. He is our primary desire and delight. Though we serve people, we don’t live for them.

Matthew 22:1-33

The same was true for Jesus. Think of how often He mentions coming to do the Father’s will. His love for us and willingness to give Himself was grounded in His love for the Father; and that gave Him, humanly speaking, the ability to love us and give His life for those who did not appreciate it. The disciple is no better than his master.

Vs. 1-14 Here is Jesus, about to die, making an appeal and warning the people and leaders about stiff-arming God when He is inviting them to salvation and the glory of living eternally with Him. It is hard for anyone to comprehend that this world is ruined and going to be destroyed and that it will be replaced with a new one. If you reject the creator of this house while He lets you live in it, He won’t take you to the next house. That seems fair to me.

Notice how hard this parable is. There is a lot of judgment and killing here. Who says Jesus only spoke of love and peace and flowers? The judgment will be dark and the warning needs to accurately reflect that truth.

Notice in vs. 10-11, people were brought in from the street. That means that they were supplied with wedding garments. Having received this sort of “grace,” and then, not to respond to it by putting on what was given to celebrate the wedding was, again, to reject the host. I would say that some people who flutter around the light, and flutter around church and the truth, and take part in the pot-lucks, and go on the mission trips and sing the songs, and call Him “Lord, Lord” but don’t do what Jesus says, will find that they didn’t really “put on Christ,” but just satisfied their own needs. (Matt. 7:21-27)

Vs. 15-22 All you can say here is “Whoa!” What a cool illustration. What is made in the image of God belongs to Him. All men are to give themselves to God.

Vs. 23-33 The Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection so they were “sad, you see.” ☺

Jesus takes them to school and avoids the entanglement of giving an answer to “who got her.” As far as I can see, answering this question according to the way the Sadducees asked it wouldn’t have gotten Jesus in trouble like the question about taxes; but it would have lowered His authority to the silly speculation of the scribes and other teachers. He would have been discredited.

The coolest line here is v. 32. Every year when I read that, I think, “Of course! I should have seen that.”

Psalm 27:1-6

The tragedy of this reading is that you only get the first six verses. Laura and I recently memorized this psalm because of the message. In our challenges as the Lord leads us through this wilderness, we need to remember what is important as we wait for and look to the Lord. In memorizing, you try to remember the next verse logically, looking for connections of thought or any linkage of words. There is a definite connection between vs. 6 & 7 that you miss here.

Vs. 1-3 Can you imagine that kind of calmness in the face of threat and adversity? David lived this.

V. 4 This was David's strength and desire. This is why David became known as a man after God's own heart.

Vs. 5-6 This is where David knew his strength and glory came from, that is, from the presence of the Lord. In that presence, whether publicly or privately, David committed himself to always praising God.

My suggestion would be to read all of Psalm 27 today and then tomorrow. It's a great psalm and it's not long.

Proverbs 6:20-26

Since Solomon is writing this, you wonder if he is somehow reflecting on his father, King David, who was ruined by his adultery, oddly enough, with Solomon's mother. I don't know.

What I do know is that if the Spirit has made the effort to be this persistent in this warning, we need to be on the alert.

Vs. 20-26 Notice it is the discipline of hearing the Word and desiring God that keeps a person focused from desiring the lies of sexual adventure.

Although both genders can commit adultery, the force of this warning is toward the weakness of men, who can be captured by the lust of their eyes and their fantasy. Ironically this is also what happened to Solomon. And again, the danger we face today, that other generations never faced, is the ease of viewing internet pornography. It's killing us. Men, the best defense is a good offense. Read and practice Proverbs 5:15-19, often.

The warning of Paul/Spirit in 1 Corinthians 10:11-12 not only applies to our bent to forget God's provision like the people in our OT reading, but is also appropriate for this proverb. *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

FEBRUARY 3

Exodus 17:8-19:15

Exodus 17:8-16

This story has launched a thousand sermons. The question is, "Why did Moses have to raise his hands?" God is obviously teaching Moses, and the people, and us, a lesson. It might be that it fits well with the following story.

Note that Joshua is mentioned here for the first time and he is honored with the victory. That the memorial is recited to Joshua might be a prophetic hint of his future role in leading Israel to victory in the land.

The Amalekites will be a pain in the neck for Israel for a long time; in fact, led by Joshua, they will fight them again in 40 years. They were present when Abraham moved to Canaan (Gen. 14:7).

Exodus 18

Vs. 1-12 Notice that Jethro was *the priest of Midian*, and that he had some knowledge of God. I don't think the knowledge of God was as lost back then as it is today. We've already met Melchizedek, and soon we'll meet Balaam, both of whom not only knew God, but served Him. In Jethro's case, it is safe to say that he didn't consider Yahweh to be the only God. Just like

Pharaoh and his magicians, they knew there were other “entities” out there, and there was power they could draw on. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that there are no other gods; but what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons. Satan is not stupid. If you can’t dissuade people from believing in God, just convince them that He is just one of many. It accomplishes the same purpose. These people were very religious, and thinking that Yahweh was only one of many gods was successful in leading them in the wrong direction.

During the months of conflict in Egypt, Moses had sent his wife and sons back to Midian. Now that it was safe, Jethro was bringing them back to Moses.

Vs. 10-12 What God did in Egypt had done something in Jethro’s heart and understanding. Actually, the entire known world was moved by what happened to Egypt. We’ll get a taste of this when Joshua reaches Jericho. It would be the same today if something happened to a major nation or superpower. News back then didn’t travel as fast, but via trade and travel, word got around. Remember, too, that one of the wonders of the world was in Egypt. Anyway, it’s hard for me to say that Jethro became a believer since he mentions other gods. Compare this to the testimony of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5:15. I’m confident we’ll see Naaman at the table, but I don’t know about Jethro, or Nebuchadnezzar for that matter. But it is safe to say that Jethro was growing in his conviction and knowledge of God.

Vs. 13-27 This portion of Scripture has not only launched a thousand sermons, but also a thousand leadership books and illustrations. Ok, this is a great principle, no doubt, but do you see any common thread between this story and the one above about the battle and Moses’ arms? What is God teaching Moses and the disciple of Jesus, working in the harvest, making disciples?

One thing this story shows me was that Moses was humble and ready to receive godly help. At this point, Moses is probably the most powerful man in the world. He might have been a chicken, but with God he was super chicken. Yet He was humble and open. Also, rather than making a monument to organizational leadership, I think that it is noteworthy that Moses saw Jethro as sent from God to help him. It shows that there is help for those of us who are not natural stellar organizers, if we are willing to hear from the Lord.

Exodus 19:1-15

A few things to note here:

Vs. 1-6 God began getting Moses ready for His meeting with the people. Time is mentioned. *The third new moon* meant that three months had passed since the Exodus. Israel will be here for another year being organized to worship and follow God.

What is coming is a major covenant with Israel as a nation. God already has a responsibility to them by virtue of the covenant He made with Abraham. That covenant was without condition since Abraham was entranced, watching God walk alone through the animals that had been sacrificed. The covenant about to be made with Israel was a conditional covenant based on their obedience. They had to pledge to do their part or the agreement would be void. It is a good thing the covenant with Abraham superseded this. We already know the story. They won’t obey and the covenant will become void. A new covenant will be needed. Still, and you can’t forget this, the promise to use Israel is prefaced on the promise to Abraham, and God will see that Israel fulfills its destiny to direct the nations to God.

V. 4 What God was/is doing with Israel is for them and for all of mankind to see. God will use them to show the truth of the heart of mankind, the power of sin, and the inability for man to become righteous before God by doing good, religious stuff. Although they failed, God will still honor the promise He made to Abraham to guide Israel as a nation. God will reward them for this service to mankind. And, as we’re reading in Matthew, God will make a new covenant, not only with Israel, but with all men through the blood of His Son.

Vs. 5-6 Notice that God was going to make them *a kingdom of priests*; that is, Israel would represent Him before a lost world, bringing the nations to God. That this is also said of the church doesn't mean we have taken Israel's place. Israel will yet fulfill this. But it does show something about God. All those led into the harvest are given this description.

Vs. 7-15 God was getting the people ready to "meet Him." He is going to begin giving the people lessons in being set apart and holy. The dramatics of staying away from the mountain are part of this.

V. 15 Why couldn't the men *go near a woman*? I would suppose that was a sign of consecration and seriousness before this great event. On the other hand, every boy growing up in Milwaukee knew that girls had cooties and just the mere touch could transfer gazillions of these scary little....well, oh, forget it. Better to go with the first suggestion.

Matthew 22:34-23:12

Matthew 22:34-66

Vs. 34-40 So now the Pharisees go after Jesus, and Jesus gives them a perfect answer, to which they have no response. According to Mark 12:28-34, it seems that a dispute began and another scribe came and heard Jesus' response to the questions. So then this scribe asked a clarifying question regarding not the greatest commandment, but the first commandment. Jesus then gave a more detailed response. This scribe attested to Jesus' accuracy and complimented Him. Jesus acknowledged the scribe's sincerity, saying he was close to the kingdom. Through this exchange, the other Pharisees and their lawyer were put to shame.

Vs. 41-46 So, as the Germans would say, Jesus "rotates the spear" and points it at them. The question about the Son of David did two things. First, it exposed their superficial understanding of Scripture. Second, it showed that the Son of David was actually revered by David as Lord (Yahweh). Obviously, they should have been revering Jesus. In Jesus showing the shallowness of the teachers, Jesus goes on to warn the people. Third, and most importantly, it says that the Son of David will be commanded, for a time, to sit next to the Father. During that time the enemies and opposition to the King will be done away with. It meant that the Christ would have to enter heaven and then be enthroned. It meant there would be a period of time between His glorification and the full establishment of His rule.

It is interesting to note that at Jesus' trial before His death, the issue of His identity as the Son of God/ Son of Man/ Son of David is the focus. It is ironic that as Jesus told them He was a King and the Son of God, they killed Him.

Notice that everyone who came to Jesus, appealing to Him as the Son of David, demonstrated amazing faith.

Matthew 23:1-12

This warning is to the disciples and people, and it has a couple of aspects.

Vs. 1-8 First, Jesus warns them not to be hypocrites like the Pharisees. Jesus is not saying *all* the burdens were wrong, but the Pharisees didn't do what they were telling the people to do. This is a good warning for disciples today. It is very easy to tell people what they need to do, but the disciple has to be doing it himself. Reach the lost? Then the pastor and elders have to lead the charge. Make disciples, who make disciples? They need to be engaged every week in groups. Otherwise, they will be laying something on people, which they themselves do not do.

All of the moral stuff, honesty, and integrity goes without saying. We are all to be in the Word and honoring God every day.

Vs. 9-10 Second, Jesus steers them away from “revering” any person too much: God? yes. Man? no. I remember reading for the first time, “Call no man, Father.” I was a Catholic, and we called all the priests, “Father.” And what Jesus said here made a lot of sense, because some of them were very frail, faulted men; but we had been led to think they were right up there with God.

In the church, the same holds true. By nature, we are attracted to the latest big name. God says not to give people titles that project a kind of super authority. That’s not good for them or us.

Notice that in what Jesus says here, He is referring to the entire Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They don't know it yet, but it is the Spirit who is their, and our, teacher. John 14:26 - *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

Vs. 11-12 Third, for emphasis, the disciple is to be a humble servant of all. A disciple of Jesus in the harvest is to be known by his/her love for Christ and their working together with other disciples to show that love by reaching out and making disciples. A true disciple doesn’t need a title to be fruitful, but it is hard for a fruitful disciple to be hidden. Their humility and servant’s heart will help them make disciples, who will make disciples with that same heart.

Psalm 27:7-14

Somehow I identify a lot with this psalm.

Vs. 7-9 Look back at v. 6 from yesterday. Do you see what connects vs. 6 and 7? It has to do with David's testimony to the Lord and now his crying out to the Lord.

Now David is crying out because of the present nearness of danger. He has responded to the Lord, but needs God to respond to him. How desperately do you need to “see God’s face?”

V. 10 David knew that everyone around him was capable of forsaking him, but God was steadfast and faithful.

Vs. 11-12 And David was teachable. He didn't just want deliverance; he wanted to know and follow the Lord. That was the way for him to remain safe in God's care.

Vs. 13-14 Look at the note regarding v. 13 and *believe*. I think the reading is better that says that if David had not believed God would save him in this life, he would have despaired.

V. 14 Actually, I prefer the KJV's rendering, *Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.* You can see there is a difference in the sense of the verse.

This is a precious and important truth. To understand how important “waiting” is in praying, do a word search on “waiting” and “wait” in the Psalms and Isaiah. It might transform your prayer life.

Notice that there is the command here to *take courage*. That courage is only possible if the Lord is our strength. This sounds like what will be said to Joshua several times as he becomes the leader of Israel.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

God is not commanding us to do something impossible. We can only be this strong and courageous in the One who can do the impossible. And we have the knowledge of His love in our Lord.

Proverbs 6:27-35

Vs. 27-33 I can understand why the Spirit emphasizes this truth, but I wonder what personal experience urged Solomon on to share this with his son. Here, it is good to remember that Bathsheba was Solomon's mother. I wonder, again, if it wasn't because of the way David damaged himself and his family. How did David imagine he'd get away with it? It was utterly irrational. David knew Bathsheba; in fact, he probably knew where to look from his roof. David knew Uriah, knew her father, and knew her grandfather. They probably all sat at his table every night. What did David think would happen? David's act destroyed his own family and that family. And to think, David also knew God.

The point here is that if you stray too close to lust, you'll get burned. To think you can do this without effect is only to fool yourself.

Seasoned servants of God have built protective measures around themselves to keep from flirting with danger, to keep themselves accountable, to make sure they don't linger around the fire. As disciples, we are no better and need to heed the warning the Spirit is giving us here.

It is interesting that in every election year in America, some of the top candidates are often destroyed by their past sexual behavior. Even in the heart of an unbeliever, unfaithfulness and adultery create a dark opinion of someone.

Vs. 34-35 Some things that God has built into us just cannot be denied.

FEBRUARY 4

Exodus 19:16-21:21

This is holy ground. God is forming these people into a nation that was meant to be a beacon of light in a dark world. Everything we read from here until Numbers will take place in the next 11 months. There will be little action, but there is a lot to learn about God and about ourselves.

Exodus 19:16-25

This shows something about the Lord, the way He chose to represent Himself to the people. This might seem extreme, but keep in mind that up until now, they had seen many, many miracles and examples of God's care, but had chosen at every turn to distrust God and gripe at Moses. God has already shown them love and grace in humbling the Egyptians. Now it is time for them to be humbled. God wants them to fear Him. Yet, we will see in Israel that neither God's love and mercy nor His awesome power will persuade them to love and follow Him. Until the power of sin is broken, mankind is helpless.

This event will be used as a lesson showing the contrast of coming to God through the law and coming to God through the redemption in Christ in Hebrews 12:18-22.

V. 22 Notice that there were already men serving as priests. It may have been that during the time in Egypt, different tribes set people apart to lead in worship. In a few chapters God will introduce the Levites as the tribe of priests.

Exodus 20

Vs. 1-17 The Ten Commandments!

Some people have an allergic reaction to them because they are in the negative. Someone else has pointed out that often the negative conveys greater clarity in a few words. Imagine trying to reframe all of these in the positive. Also, imagine trying to convey directions and warnings to your kids by only using positive wording, like "don't run out in the street," or "don't put your hand on a hot burner on the stove."

These 10 "Words" would sum up everything God wanted the people to do. If they followed God in faith, obeying these commandments, the other laws would have been a piece of cake. If the Ten Commandments meant nothing to the people, the other laws would be burdens to them.

The commandments have two parts. Do you see the difference? Also, all but one of these is repeated by Jesus in the NT, the keeping of the Sabbath. Why do you think it is not endorsed and promoted for the church by Jesus?

Vs. 2-3 This is the first commandment. Notice that it is based on God's love and grace to them.

Vs. 4-6 This is the second commandment. Notice too that even here, God's love is mentioned.

V. 7 This is the third commandment to honor the name of the Lord. In Catholic Milwaukee, I grew up thinking it was a commandment to abuse the name of the Lord.

Vs. 8-11 This is the fourth commandment to consecrate the Sabbath and keep it holy. Notice that the Sabbath is connected to the seven literal 24-hour days of creation. God worked on the first six days and rested on the seventh. They would have understood the days of creation as 24-hour days.

Vs. 12-17 Now based on following God in faith and love, you love your neighbor as yourself.

Vs. 18-21 This is the people's response and Moses' explanation for the sound and light show.

If this order is chronological, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on this short excursion on the mountain. Then he came down to pass on the commandments and to let the people know that God wanted to make a covenant with them, the commandments being representative of their obedience to the covenant. Moses then went back up the mountain to write the book of the covenant with the other regulations for the nation.

The sight must have been fear inspiring. Earlier it is said that the smoke rising off the mountain was like from a furnace, violent and forceful. Add to this the lightning, thunder, and trumpets, and you can understand why the people were petrified.

V. 20 gives the purpose for this show of power. We'll see that it didn't work.

Vs. 22-26 This section fits with the commandments, restating one of the commandments and adding God's stipulations on how He should be approached in worship and sacrifice. Within the next few months they would begin building the tabernacle, but until the completion of the tabernacle, if they made altars, this was how they should do it.

The main lesson for them here is to approach God in fear and respect, without representing Him in ways that He does not choose. The images and symbols of the worship of Yahweh will come from Yahweh, not from their imaginations. God was always to have been worshipped in spirit and in truth.

For us as disciples, we should also follow this "advice." If you look at what Jesus says we should do, and how "worship" is referred to in the NT, I wonder sometimes if our "worship" isn't more a product of our imaginations and needs. I'm not saying all of it is wrong, but if the things that God desires are missing, if there is no worship in serving Him in the harvest, and it's all to give us a nice feeling, does that really give glory to God? Is any of it really for Him, or simply for us? *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* (John 15:8)

Exodus 21:1-21

Now, there are lots of places in the Bible, like Proverbs, where the order and connection between verses or themes defies logic or imagination. Since I enjoy the exercise, I'll suggest some logical

connections at times. And if you see something that seems to fit together, go for it. If you can't see the connection I make, maybe you can make your own.

The last block of verses seemed to address the first four commandments, repeating one of them and generally talking about approaching God. These verses seem to address the last six commandments, repeat the commandment regarding parents, and generally talk about issues in living with one another.

Vs. 1-6 The slavery mentioned here is when a person makes himself a slave because of debt or need. It was like being hired under contract for six years. Every seventh year the contracts were voided. This is not forceful oppression and ownership of humans.

V. 1 hints at the cycle of release that God will institute later. The image of the slave wishing to give up his freedom and to stay "enslaved" to remain with his wife and children has been used as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice, allowing Himself to be "pierced through" for love of his bride. It makes a good image for a disciple.

Vs. 7-11 This was "selling" a daughter into marriage, where the daughter became a concubine or servant wife. This is what Hagar was to Abe. She was a kind of wife, but was still referred to by God as the slave woman.

Notice that what is given here is humane and lawful and is probably a corrective to something bad that had been going on in the culture.

Vs. 12-14 This is the 6th commandment with the addition of what to do with someone who accidentally kills someone. It was apparently expected that if one man killed another, even by accident, someone had the right to kill the killer. God puts the brakes on this. Thou shall not kill means you shall not murder.

Vs. 15-17 This has to do with the 5th commandment, with v. 16 sitting in. I would suggest that the connection with v. 16 is that "honoring your parents" also meant caring for them, financially and physically, in their old age or need. To take a son from his parents by force, so that he could not care for them, was worthy of death. Think about what Jesus said about "Corban" (Mark 7:11). That was similar to this.

Vs. 18-19 This is two men willingly fighting each other, not one attacking another. Notice that the injuring party had to pay for the injured man.

Vs. 20-21 This was a new, better law. It meant death to the slave owner if the slave died. But if the slave survived for a couple of days, it was, I think, to be looked on as God's intervention, that God could have saved him but didn't, and there was to be no punitive justice.

From here on, it will only get more random, at times, and you'll be happy for the NT portion.

Matthew 23:13-39

Jesus is only days before His sacrifice for our sin, and here He is pronouncing His official condemnation of the Jewish leadership. After three years of being hounded by them, showing them mercy and grace, it is time to strongly "speak the truth in love" to these leaders.

So, how many woes are there? This is like Bible Study 101. Take every woe and figure out what Jesus is stating about the Pharisees and leaders. What is the key thing they were doing wrong? What should we be doing better as followers of Christ in the harvest?

I'll mention some things that stand out to me.

Vs. 13-15 Notice that the first woe has to do with keeping people from finding God. This was the whole point of Israel's mission, and the leaders were keeping people out. Although God is reaching people now, through the church, do not think that Israel will not fulfill this purpose.

There will come a time when the church is removed, and Israel will come to Christ and evangelize the world as all hell is breaking loose upon them. Redeeming a lost world was and is Israel's mission. It is Christ's mission and it is His disciple's mission.

Vs. 16-22 Jesus has told the disciples never to swear at all. Yet, here Jesus is showing that these men were teaching people to worship stuff and not to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Vs. 23-24 I think this image is funny.

Vs. 25-26 We all do this. We think if we don't get in trouble, don't smoke, don't get people pregnant, etc., we are right with God.

Vs. 27-28 Rather than making people holy or blessed or disciples, everyone who touched the scribes or Pharisees became unclean and disqualified from worshipping God.

Vs. 29-36 The last woe puts the entire OT history on the shoulders of these leaders. Just as the law and prophets continued to John, the guilt of hardhearted rebellion against God and killing His messengers continued to these men who were about to kill the ultimate messenger, the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God.

V. 33 Imagine, this is God speaking to these men. Whoa!

V. 34 Notice the *I*.

Jesus pronounces judgment on this group of people, this particular generation. The imminence of this coming judgment often gets confused with the second coming of Christ. Paul, in particular, had this judgment in view. You see this reflected in the distress that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 7. The judgment with this generation would hit in 70 A.D., when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed by the Romans.

Vs. 37-39 This is a second lament of Jesus over Jerusalem. The part of this that hits me is the ending. The nation will not see Jesus again until they are so desperate, that like Israel as slaves in Egypt, the collective cry of the nation will be so intense that they cry out for help and are willing to welcome Him, whom they as a nation have already rejected.

Psalm 28

I wonder if the crying out of Israel in the Tribulation will sound like this psalm. It would be a blessing to be able to write something like this, but it came at a price for David. To deeply know the Lord will mean to suffer for His sake. And the testimony of praise has much more meaning when it comes from those who have been tested and proven in living for the Lord.

You see some very distinct parts of this song to the Lord:

Vs. 1-2 David is calling out to the Lord for help.

Vs. 3-5 David's distress over the wicked and their attempts to harm him.

Vs. 6-7 David's personal praise and confidence in the Lord.

Vs. 8-9 Israel's need for the Lord and His guidance.

Proverbs 7:1-5

Notice again the figurative reference to binding the Word to your body to control your actions. This is how important and close the Word should be to us. We assent to this, but Solomon and the Spirit are saying we should so passionately understand our need and the danger around us, that we intimately connect ourselves to the Word. We ignore this to our own harm.

Notice, too, that sensual pleasure is the great danger again, and attraction to the Word and wisdom is contrasted to the passion and attraction to the desires that will ruin us as disciples.

FEBRUARY 5

Exodus 21:22-23:13

The laws that God is giving here may seem varied and random, but there is a pattern. The laws here do not spell out every possible situation, but they do provide a framework of situations that you could use to make applications to other similar, but unmentioned, events. We see something like this on TV in courtroom dramas. The hot-shot lawyer will find a case like, "Smith vs. the State of Nevada," and use that judgment to help decide a case that has some similar aspects.

It seems that the theme of this first block is restitution and punishment in case of a death.

Exodus 21:22-36

Vs. 22-25 Notice that the baby is born prematurely. Some translations say "miscarry," but the Hebrew has a separate word for miscarriage. This is an injury that causes premature birth. If the child lives, no problem. If either the mother or child is harmed, the father sets the restitution and judges determine if this is fair. If the woman is injured, the penalty will be the same as the injury. If either mother or child died, then death is the penalty.

This is the first mention of the famous law of retribution. Notice that it actually limits what can be done to a person in judgment. Life for life is clear, but the others say that you cannot go beyond duplicating the injury. This limited the punishment. If someone broke your tooth, you couldn't kill them, maim them or take two teeth. It makes it clear too, that this was overseen by the town judges or elders. This wasn't something that took place privately in an alley.

Vs. 26-27 This law gives a slight addition to the law of retribution in the case of a slave. As in the law above, this does not seem to be premeditated violence, but someone losing their mind and lashing out. Not only would the slave owner lose his eye or his tooth, but he would also lose the slave.

Vs. 28-36 These three situations have to do with restitution where animals are inflicting harm or are harmed by carelessness.

V. 30 What strikes me here is that in the first situation, the man who owned the ox was liable for death if he knew the animal was dangerous. Yet in this case, the judges and family of the victim could elect not to kill the man since he himself didn't do the killing, but instead, demand a ransom payment of some kind.

You'll notice in many of these laws that God is sowing thoughts and giving traditions that will point to Christ's sacrifice for us. We are ransomed by His blood.

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

V. 33 People were responsible to be careful for others and their property.

Exodus 22

Vs. 1-17 This section seems to be laws to clarify the eighth commandment, *Do not steal*. Notice that this section hangs together because each block begins with *If*. Verse 18 begins a different kind of thought.

V. 1 This sets the theme of this section. This is like the law of retribution for loss or theft.

Vs. 2-3 Notice that the death of the thief was to be avoided. The burglary at night left the owner defenseless in defending himself. The message is pretty clear. Stuff is not a reason to kill someone. Let it go.

If the thief was caught but spent everything, he was to be sold into slavery to repay what was stolen.

V. 4 This reflects back on v. 1. If the thief was caught and still had the stolen animals, he gave back the animals he stole and an animal for each one he stole.

Vs. 5-6 Again, carelessness resulting in loss had to be paid for.

Vs. 7-13 There were no banks, self-storage rooms or doggy and cattle hotels back then. If you went on a trip, you had to leave your stuff in the care of someone. These laws make sure that the property or animal was not lost as a result of the caretaker.

Vs. 14-15 And then what about borrowing your neighbor's ox? If the neighbor damaged it, you made full restitution, but if the owner was there either using it to plow or pull out a stump or watching it being done, the owner had responsibility by his ownership to supervise and keep things safe.

Again, these were general situations given to give a baseline in more complex or unexpected situations. I'm sure if the owner was there, but suddenly the borrowing neighbor did something bizarre and the animal died, there were other laws to make sure there was restitution.

Vs. 16-17 It seems that the issue in this section is "restitution for damaging someone's property or means of revenue." You might come up with a better title or idea. Back in that day, livestock carried things and moved things and plowed things. You can understand the money, property and livestock, but what is that section about the virgin doing there?

First, when a family married off their virgin daughter, they were given money, cattle or something, the *bride-price*. If a girl lost her virginity, the family was robbed of the *bride-price*. Virginity, and the implied faithfulness and virtue thereof, was prized in that day.

Notice, that she is "seduced" and not a willing participant. The girl is not looked on as being responsible. The guy is responsible. Back in that day, a girl could be engaged as a young teen. Some say that Mary, Jesus' mother, could have been as young as 14 or 15 when she was betrothed to Joseph. In this case, I suppose if she was at a feast or celebration and someone was feeding her wine this could happen. (BTW, when a guy says, "Can I buy you a drink?" that is not a gift, it is a speculative investment.) In any case, this guy was a premeditative predator and the girl is not seen as being of age or maturity to fend off the influence.

The penalty was not only the bride-price, but marriage, unless the guy was such a jerk that the father couldn't stand thinking of his little girl being hitched to him or having him in the family. Whatever you get from this episode, marriage is seen as the proper context for sex.

Vs. 18-20 So what is these warnings doing here? Generally speaking it seems to be concluding the previous section. If there was an unknown theft or if there was need for prosperity or for information, they were to go to God, not to other sources. The people were to depend on God.

V. 18 Remember when Joseph was testing his brothers in Genesis 44:15, he said that he discovered their "theft" by divination. Joseph didn't really divine anything. He said that to conceal his identity. Divination is how you did things back then. You hired an occultist to see an event or tell you the future. You can see how this would be used as a way to make decisions or find out things. God wanted them to come to Him and use the law to decide. In a short time we'll see God give the people a method for judgment, the Urim and the Thummim, by which they could find out almost anything. They were to depend on God only.

V. 19 Baal worship was a way to obtain fertility and fruit in your fields and livestock. Sexual intercourse with cult prostitutes was part of this worship, as was having intercourse with animals. You wonder how VD was introduced to mankind? I'm not a doctor, but this would be a safe guess.

V. 20 Especially in pagan worship, you worshipped in order to get something. God was the One they were to seek.

Vs. 21-27 Over and over it is mentioned in the NT that loving your neighbor was the fulfilling of the law. These laws regarding the defenseless also have something to do with finance and prosperity.

Vs. 21-24 They might be tempted to take advantage of aliens, widows and children, working them for next to nothing, feeding them little, because there was no one to protect them. That still happens today.

Vs. 25-27 Even in lending money to these kinds of people, you couldn't make interest. Nor could you hold as collateral anything they needed for daily life and well-being.

V. 28 At the heart of the matter was their respect for God and those God put in authority to keep law and order. Just as a note here, Paul quotes this sarcastically in Acts 23:3-5. Paul was saying that he didn't know the high priest was the high priest because the people hated him and made jokes about his corruptness. The fact that they spoke evil of the high priest proved he was not a ruler of the people. Please tell me you got that.

Vs. 29-30 The people were to see themselves completely in God's care. Blessing came from Him; therefore, they were to be quick to give Him what He requested in these laws. Also, these tithes were used for the poor and to feed the priest and Levites who cared for the people.

V. 31 They were to see themselves so completely in God's care that they didn't need to eat road kill. They could trust God for His provision and walk on by.

Exodus 23:1-13

This section looks like there is more emphasis on "love your neighbor," but there is still a sense of commerce and well-being. These people lived directly from the land, and often from "hand to mouth." God is training them and teaching them to depend on Him. He will take care of them with His love so they can relax and show love to others.

Vs. 1-3 This is the ninth commandment; but again, what did you gain by lying and bearing false witness? It was often for financial advantage or personal well-being. Notice here they couldn't be *partial to a poor man*. Surely the rich or the thrifty had something to spare. Again, that is the financial aspect of what is implied in this section on truth. Justice was always to be just.

Vs. 4-5 This is not only "love your enemy," but his life and livelihood would be at risk losing an animal. God brings justice and vindication. We "play God," not by vengeance or looking the other way, but by showing His love.

Vs. 6-9 Faith in God gives courage to be just and fair. There is no need to oppress the poor or needy, or to watch it happen. Notice then, that there would be no need to take a bribe or pervert justice.

Vs. 10-13 This is the first mention of the Sabbatical year. This will loom large in Israel's history, but once we are past Deuteronomy it will become hidden and forgotten, until Jeremiah. It looks like Israel never, under any king, celebrated the Sabbath year. Here, it is mentioned as to how it related to the poor. The poor were free to gather food for a day or two but not harvest. This would have been different than the general provision given later that landowners were always to leave something in the corners of their fields so the poor could find food. In this case, the poor could wander into the fields and take what they found growing for the entire growing year.

Even more than the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year reflected a deep trust and dependence on God. "Can I relax and trust and not work for a day? Sure." "Can I relax and trust and not sow or harvest for a year?" They never obeyed this one. But image trusting God and having the year off!

Although some of the laws look social and simply humane, God wanted the people to see them as coming from Him so that the message behind the laws and the motivation to obey was, "You are my people. Love Me and love your neighbor." As Jesus says later, loving God and your neighbor sum up the law. As disciples, we are consecrated to God. We belong to Him to live for Him as lights in the world. For those in the western world, obeying government laws, as it says in Romans 13, should be easy for us because we know why we're here. Loving our neighbor to show them the love we have found is our mission, born out of our love and appreciation for Jesus saving and calling us to Himself and to His service.

Matthew 24:1-28

Vs. 1-2 Jesus is talking about the immediate judgment of Israel and Jerusalem under Titus in 70 A.D. The disciples now knew this was coming. This launches them into asking Jesus what the *close (end) of the age* would look like.

Vs. 3-28 *The Mount of Olives*, directly across from Jerusalem, would have given this discourse a great vantage point to view the city. It also gave it a great name, "The Olivet Discourse."

V. 3 Notice that the disciples ask Jesus about the *close of the age*. The *close of the age* is what Jesus is talking about here, not what will happen in 70 A.D. It will be the time of the Tribulation of the Jews that will precede the second coming of Christ and the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth in Jerusalem.

Vs. 4-8 These are the days leading up to the Tribulation. There will be confusion and questioning. Jesus describes these as the pains before the birth. Notice that there will be deception and people claiming to be Christ.

Vs. 9-14 This would be the first part of the Tribulation. It will be a time of disaster on earth, and therefore, people will be looking for Christ. This means that the Bible will be used and people will have some idea of what is happening.

Even during this awful time, the earth will be reached by the proclamation of the gospel. By whom? By the 144,000 Jewish preachers from Revelation. Israel will rise and fulfill its ministry.

Vs. 9-10 During this time of disaster and hardship on the earth, the heart of man will instinctively know that God is responsible and the followers of Christ will be *hated by all nations*. Imagine that. Since it will not be popular or cool to be a Christian, many "believers" will *fall away* and will *betray* and *hate* other, true, believers. It is a way that the Lord will reveal those who actually belong to Him. How foolish we are to think that the mark of a disciple is anything other than bearing our cross of death with a heart of love and joy, following our Lord into the harvest.

Vs. 15-28 The *abomination of desolation* refers to the event where a man, the antichrist, will come into the rebuilt temple, stop the worship, set up a desecrating image, and proclaim himself to be god. At that point in time, there will be 3.5 years of tribulation left; and at this point, all heck will break loose on Israel as a nation, and on all of those who have become disciples of Christ. During this time, it will get very desperate, having greater deceiving signs, more destruction and death; and when it gets darkest, Jesus returns. The sign of Jesus' coming will be so pronounced and obvious that all men will see it regardless of where they are on the earth.

Vs. 27-28 refers to the appearance of *the Son of Man* in the heavens. If someone were to ask, "where is the body (corpse)," the answer was to look up to the circling "eagles" (vultures). Jesus was telling His disciples that the question as to where the Christ was would only be answered one way, "Look up."

As disciples, we know that there is great judgment coming and this earth will get wrecked. We work now realizing this is coming. Things will not get better; they will get worse. We who are

saved will be taken before that time, but others will go through the Tribulation. Jesus says the harvest is white; but there won't always be time to harvest for us, so we follow Him now, every day, reaching out to the lost, making disciples, who make disciples.

Especially in election years, we need to remember we are not called or commissioned to obsess about our political situation. We are to work in the harvest as the storm clouds are gathering on the horizon.

Psalm 29

The most natural way to witness is to be overcome by God. Count as precious the love of Christ and His payment and deliverance and forgiveness and gift to you, and it comes out of you. Work with the lost in the harvest, and see what you have that you take for granted as you strain in prayer to God for the salvation of others; and you will find praise and gratitude to God becoming heartfelt and natural.

If you read this slowly, looking for clues to the structure, this beautiful psalm is also a good lesson in studying the Bible.

Vs. 1-2 This section is marked by the word *ascribe*. What does that mean?

Vs. 3-9 Notice the word *voice* - the Word of God.

V. 10 He *sits enthroned*. Cool! Think of the first lines of the Lord's Prayer.

V. 11 Amen.

Proverbs 7:6-23

One of the things that is interesting in reading the Proverbs at this speed, daily, is that you notice how often Solomon is hitting on this theme. Did you ever notice this before this year? I guess God is really, really, really saying, "Watch Out!" Stay away from the willing woman. Beware of sexual adventure. Unplug the computer. If you're married, make enjoyment with one another your hobby and passion. If you need to be married, lay it before the Lord, submit to Him, make Him your heart's desire and begin asking God how to seek for a marriage partner. Ask Him where you can get involved in the harvest, and as He leads you toward that person, focus on the harvest now. Don't wait.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that this man is already "had" because of the openness of his own heart. It isn't the woman or the website that is the ultimate problem. She has him here.

Vs. 10-21 Hollywood!

Vs. 22-23 We think that God is overstating the case, yet our world of leaders, political and spiritual, is a landscape filled with corpses. And each of these intelligent people walked to their demise as the fool in v. 7. When will we learn?

FEBRUARY 6

Exodus 23:14-25:40

Exodus 23:14-13

Vs. 14-19 These feasts were a great idea by God to have the entire nation, and the men in particular, always focused on God's salvation, redemption and selection of Israel. The feasts made the people think of God's provision and His cleansing of their sin. There is actually much more to this, but it is amazing to think of what is built into these three festivals. More than anything, in a heart of faith, these feasts would have made Israel strong in knowing that the promise of God to redeem all mankind was being worked out through them. They were the

chosen people through whom the promise to Adam and Eve and the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled and proclaimed in the world.

As a footnote to these feasts and the presentation of sacrifices and firstfruits, three stipulations are given. Looking at them, it seems to me that each applies to each feast in that order.

V. 18 This has to do with the Passover feast where yeast or “leaven” was not allowed.

V. 19 They should offer only the best as firstfruits. This was the feast at Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover.

The young goat and its mother's milk - this has to do with the feast in October, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Men smarter and godlier than I have broken their heads trying to understand and explain the prohibition here, but it makes sense to me that it's just out of line, so if God said not to do it, don't do it. It could be that there was a pagan ritual involving this. It could also be that since a goat plays a significant part in the Day of Atonement, any goats offered were to be roasted.

In a practical sense, for all the men to come to Jerusalem three times a year would have made Israel very unique in the eyes of all its neighbors. They would have been unique not just religiously, but in terms of sanity, leaving the country unguarded for weeks, in fact, the same weeks every year. For Israel itself, it would have demonstrated great love, faith and dependence on God their Savior.

As disciples, we live with reminders of our salvation and the grace given to us. That God would choose us to love, forgive, and call to His service is incredible. The Word reminds us of God's plan to redeem and bring salvation through Jesus. Communion reminds us of the price that was paid to redeem us. The very fact that the Church exists should be a reminder of our Savior, our place in God's kingdom and our mission to reach a lost world, making disciples. God has built all this, and more, into our lives as disciples; but they only stay vital and meaningful if we are in love with Christ and are following Him in the harvest.

Vs. 20-22 This is a promise to the people that God will give them the land. They have seen His power, so there should be no doubt that God will do this. They see the mountain smoking, burning at the top, lightning, thunder, a blaring trumpet...all indications that what Moses is telling them from God is a pretty good bet.

One question I have is regarding the angel. Is this just an angel or is it Christ? I say this because of what Paul/Spirit says in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

In the verses above it says Christ was represented in the “Rock” or provision of water; but since there is the aspect of following or accompanying them, I would guess that Jesus was that angel who led them. God's presence was with the people, not by proxy, but He was actually there in the person of Christ, the angel of the Lord. Now, in the promise of the Holy Spirit, God is not only “with us,” He dwells within us. Amazing.

Vs. 23-33 There is a lot to observe here.

Notice that God says He will bless them and give them victory, but it is repeated that they dare not worship the gods of these people. That sounds like the warning about the tree of good and evil.

Notice that God says He will not drive the people out immediately and why. Also, God says He will drive the people out of the land. This means that, in a sense, Israel never had to fight against

anyone. There never had to be any bloodshed. The people of the land knew that God was giving the land to Israel and they could have responded to God and left. That is an interesting wrinkle on what we'll be reading in Joshua, especially when we see what Rahab says.

Exodus 24

Vs. 1-8 This is the "Mosaic Covenant," that is, the covenant that God made with Israel through Moses. It is a conditional covenant, in that the people have to agree to obey in order to see the blessings. This obedience was to have been driven by their love of God for their salvation from Egypt. It would be saving faith by believing that God was fulfilling the promise to Abraham through them. Even here, the focus was not on them, but on God, who would show them love as a witness to draw the nations.

Moses had already been writing, since he mentions a *Book of the Covenant*. The Ten Commandments actually signified other commands God had given and those He would still give. This is why in the New Testament we'll see statements that loving God and one's neighbor actually fulfill the law. Just as loving God and one's neighbor fulfilled the Ten Commandments (Romans 13:9), the Ten Commandments summarized all of the laws of the Old Testament.

The people agreed to the covenant and in the only time this happens in the OT, they are sprinkled (somehow) with the *blood of the covenant*. Those words, *the blood of the covenant*, will be repeated when Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, in making a new covenant.

Just for clarification, the covenant that Jesus makes with us for redemption and righteousness before God is unconditional. In the Mosaic Covenant (MC) obedience was a mandate. The MC was an "If/Then" arrangement, not for salvation, but for national blessing. I think that the "faith that saved" was in the God of Israel, who redeemed Israel according to His promise to Abraham. No one could ever be saved by obeying the law. Paul says that salvation is, and always has been, through faith.

Vs. 9-11 A meal usually followed the making of a covenant. It says they see God. Jesus, John and Paul all say that no one has ever seen God. So what is happening here? Again, I think that they are seeing the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Son of God. Seeing Jesus is the only time mankind has ever seen God.

Another thing worth mentioning has to do with the men at this meal, two of whom are Aaron's sons. We need to keep in mind that through these 40 years, God is going to be teaching the people His holiness and the deadliness of sin. These two men are given a great privilege. How many people have eaten with God? Surely they've gotta be like "buds" with God, and if they mess up, He'll cut them some slack. Right? Wrong.

Vs. 12-18 Joshua went further up the mountain with Moses, but didn't go up to the place where Moses met God. This does mean that Joshua is being given great privilege. I find it interesting that Moses' successor is already shown to us.

Aaron and the guys went down to the people to take care of stuff. I doubt that Joshua or Moses had food for 40 days. God must have somehow been providing for them too.

Exodus 25

Vs. 1-9 It is interesting that the first thing God does after the covenant is to begin forming the nation around their worship of Him. Notice that the materials for the tabernacle and everything in it were to come from their free offerings as their hearts led them.

God either gave Moses detailed plans or He gave Moses a supernatural memory.

Also, some of these materials for building the tabernacle were probably what the people brought out of Egypt. But in the forty years they were living in the wilderness, I'll bet this community of 2-3 million people became a stop on the caravan routes.

Vs. 10-22 Beginning from the very innermost room, the Most Holy Place, God describes the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. It was here every year on the Day of Atonement that the sins of the nation would be provisionally forgiven as a symbol of the forgiveness that would come through Jesus.

Vs. 23-30 Now God describes the furniture in the Holy Place, the room right before the veil that covered the entrance to the Most Holy Place. It is interesting that the next thing God talks about is the table for the bread of the Presence. The twelve loaves (Lev. 24:5) represent the people of Israel always being before God. That this symbol was bread probably signified that the life and provision of Israel came from Him.

Vs. 31-40 The lampstand signified God's light and life to the people. The talent of gold in v. 39 was about 75 pounds.

As you think of these pieces of furniture, remember that in all God is doing here, He is setting the visual aids to what redemption in Jesus would look like. The three pieces mentioned symbolize the light God gives, the care and provision He gives, and most importantly, the forgiveness and grace we receive from Him. The mercy seat was set atop of the ark of the covenant which held the Word. The forgiveness is given to us based, not on the law, but upon the promise of the living Word. These three pieces represent what God gives to His people.

The only piece missing from the Holy Place is the altar of incense representing the prayers of God's people rising up before Him. This is our part. Of course, there is still the veil, but in a couple of days in Matthew, Jesus will take that away.

There is deep symbolism in these pieces of furniture, and blessings for those who take the time to consider and meditate on them.

Matthew 24:29-51

It is good to keep in mind that all of this prophetic information will have a very helpful and specific meaning to the people going through the Tribulation. They will understand these words better than we do. The Lord is giving them a basic outline of what will happen. It is OK if we don't understand everything fully. They will.

Vs. 29-31 I've always thought this was comical. In v. 15 from yesterday, the antichrist goes into the temple with an attitude and declares himself to be god. Then he walks out on the temple steps, and basically the earth and the universe go kaput. Cool, he has just pronounced himself captain of the Titanic.

This is not the rapture of the church before the Tribulation. This gathering refers to all believers on earth at the end of the Tribulation. Because of the persecution, they will be driven into all nations. The believing on earth will be supernaturally gathered, but not be "changed" as Paul says the raptured church will be "changed" in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. These believers will enter the Millennial Kingdom as normal humans with normal and untransformed bodies. It is at this time, too, that the Lord will resurrect all the OT believers and they will enter, enjoy, and serve in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

Vs. 32-51 The fig tree illustration is a reference to the "birth pangs" that are not the coming of Christ, but give the sign that His "day" is coming. This coming "day" will be all seven years of the Tribulation. For those disciples who are watching, there will be a sense of alertness when they see times of great distress hit the nations and the earth.

Vs. 36-39 Jesus says that the day will come totally unexpected. There will be enough peace on earth to allow the normal flow of life. The reference has to be to the beginning of the Tribulation. This “day of the Lord” will bring such severe judgment that all normal life on earth will end. Once the Tribulation begins, people who are wise can begin marking X's on their calendars.

I understand vs. 40-41 to refer to the rapture, that is, God removing the church from earth before the Tribulation, thus introducing the Tribulation. Just as God made a choice between belief and unbelief in the plagues of Egypt, He will do that also as He begins the Tribulation. The result will be turmoil on the earth and many in Israel will be awakened to belief in the gospel and their Messiah.

Vs. 42-51 This is the second time Jesus has used this example with His disciples. Now all of this information will have a great meaning to the people going through the Tribulation, but Jesus expects all of His disciples in all ages to be awake and alert. I know the final thing Jesus says about the lazy servant can be taken to mean that this servant wasn't a believer. I think that defeats the purpose of the warning; but then, you don't want a believer thrown into hell. What are we to do?

My take on this is that the servant is a believer, like millions we have today who live for themselves as good Christians but do not follow Christ into the harvest. When they are judged...and we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ...their lives and works built on the foundation will be looked at. I think this is another view of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. To *cut him in pieces* is a figure of speech like, “the fir will fly,” or “tear him a new one.” These hypocrites will suffer. I think those who live a lukewarm life for Christ will feel deep distress and remorse in that moment when they see their life's work burned away and realize, in the presence of their Savior, what a waste it was. I know the *weeping and gnashing of teeth* is usually reserved for those who end up in hell, but I think the anguish can be applied in this case to those who, though believing, treat the love and grace and mission of Christ with contempt.

Psalm 30

The note here that this was at the dedication of the temple probably means the tabernacle when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. David must have had times he wondered if he would ever see this day. David's deep despair is felt here, but out of that despair and crying out came this amazing testimony of God's care. Verses 11 and 12 came out of that suffering.

Vs. 1-3 Look at all the things David mentions in these verses. These are the things God would also do for those who came to the tabernacle and sought God's help and mercy. Notice the connection between crying out to God and being healed.

Vs. 4-5 After all of the civil war and the oppression of enemies, this nation was now united under God, under David. The waiting was worth it. The morning had come.

Vs. 6-7 David had to experience betrayal and persecution to become humble. That oppression was a blessing.

Vs. 8-10 In persecution is where David learned to cry out to the Lord.

Vs. 11-12 And look what David learned and how finding God as his help changed him.

As we read these psalms, they should give us hope as we are crying out and waiting on the Lord. The joy that God gave David will be given to us also, if we wait on the Lord.

Proverbs 7:24-27

There she is again. In my book, Looking Out For Number One, I used these verses of warning for Andreas when Angela came to get him. I intentionally made Angela look “normal” and “moral,” because most men are smart enough not to go after a wild looking prostitute; but the

woman next door, or at church, or in the next office who they see at lunch, comes right through their radar. But it all leads to the same place.

FEBRUARY 7

Exodus 26-27

It is probably a good idea to have a diagram of the tabernacle. In the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 147, you can find one.

By the way, have you figured out how long a cubit was?

Exodus 26

Vs. 1-29 The tabernacle was actually the inner tent. The area around the tabernacle was the courtyard of the tabernacle. God has already described the ark and mercy seat that go in the Most Holy Place (see the BKC diagram) and the table for the bread of the Presence and the lampstand which were in the Holy Place. In chapter 26 God gives Moses the plan for the inner tent, the tabernacle, where they stood.

Notice the directions on the diagram. The entrance faced east, so if you were looking at the entrance to the courtyard or the tabernacle, you were facing west.

V. 30 This gives you the idea that God also showed Moses visually what it would look like.

Vs. 31-34 This is the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. This is the veil that was torn when Jesus died, showing that mankind could now have full and unhindered access to the throne of grace, or in this case, the seat of mercy.

Vs. 35-37 Looking in the Holy Place you would be looking west. On the left (south) was the lampstand and on the right (north) was the table for the bread of the Presence. Looking straight ahead you would have seen the veil to the Most Holy Place. Missing at this point would be the altar of incense that stood in the middle just in front of the veil. That incense would represent the prayers of God's people rising up the veil and coming into His presence.

Notice how much detail and “art” God is putting into the tabernacle. This would be a major project for the people. They would give all of the jewels and precious metals and their best craftsmen. The skins had to be cured, cut, dyed and sewn. Interestingly, God had prepared the people to build this center of worship. These are the people who built the cities for the Egyptians, so I’ll bet they had skills. Finding good drawings of the tabernacle, the ark, and the lampstand will help in your appreciation of the art.

My bent is not to go overboard when building buildings for churches, but the people who criticize churches for doing a good job and making the inside and outside look nice have never spent time reading how God designed His “tent of meeting.”

The tabernacle would prepare Israel for its national identity. In addition to worshipping only Yahweh, they would worship Him in only one place, not all over, under every tree and on every high place, as Israel will do later in idolatry.

By the way, you’re in for a surprise in your “Tabernacle Construction” reading in a couple of days.



Exodus 27

Now that the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place have been described, God describes the altar and the courtyard. God's presence was in the Most Holy Place. The courtyard protected the people from approaching God to their own destruction. God was to be approached through the entrance to the courtyard and then through sacrifice expressing thanks, repentance and worship. All of this would be symbolic of what God would provide for mankind in the death and resurrection of His Son.

Vs. 1-8 This is the making of the altar for sacrifices.

Vs. 9-19 This is the court of the tabernacle.

Vs. 20-21 You can see the conditional nature of this covenant with Israel. God promised to be with them if they obeyed. The lampstand was to burn perpetually. You can see the symbolism in that, yet the people had to bring the oil. I'm sure they didn't always bring it, and at different times in their history I'll bet the light went out.

Yet, God's promise to save mankind and fulfill the promise to Abraham was without condition. What the old covenant couldn't do because of the power of sin, the new covenant has made possible because of Jesus. He has provided forgiveness and has broken the power of sin for all who are reborn in Him.

Matthew 25:1-30

Yesterday I mentioned that I thought the “unfaithful” servant could be a believer. I do, but to be fair to the text and to a normal interpretation, “the weeping and gnashing of teeth” club would put him into the unbelieving category. Jesus often told His parables in different situations and to different groups. When they are applied directly to the Twelve and to those who believed, the impact was more of a warning for reward and punishment. If you want to see what I mean, look at Luke 12:35-48. This teaching was for the Twelve, and although treating a disciple like the unfaithful and dispensing severe punishment was warned, I don't see that as damnation.

I think believers in the western world play too much with grace. We fall asleep in the light. Yes, we are loved and totally accepted and don't have to do anything to be absolutely accepted and welcomed into the arms of God, yet God wants us to work in the harvest with the passion of our Savior.

Both of these parables are directed to the religiously half-hearted, not to the Twelve. In Luke 13:23-30 someone, probably one of the many who followed Jesus, asked Him a similar question. This would have been a couple months earlier. You can see by Jesus' answer that He was challenging the unsaved followers to become fully serious as quickly as possible.

Vs. 1-13 This is the parable of the 10 virgins and has to do with a person's readiness for the return of Christ. What I've appreciated about the Plymouth Brethren is the healthy biblical emphasis they put on looking for the return of our Savior “for His own.” Hardly anyone today mentions our expectant waiting, but Jesus taught it and it is all through Paul's writing. The first Awana verse I memorized as a new Awana leader was Titus 2:11-13, *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

The five unprepared virgins don't get in and their condemnation is similar to those religious persons we found in Matthew 7 who did mighty miracles in His name, but to whom Jesus said, *I never knew you.*

Vs. 14-30 The parable of the talents is interesting because it is told in two different places. In Luke, Jesus tells it at Zacchaeus' house, before He enters Jerusalem. The point is the same; God

expects us to invest the truth He has given us to gain interest, or we would say, to bear fruit. Fruitlessness, by not expecting the master's return and therefore hiding the truth, signifies a lack of love and faith in the master.

Applied to that generation of Israel, they had the truth of God, but did not bring Him the fruit of a believing nation nor of many nations coming to worship in Jerusalem.

If an unbeliever is in view, he goes to eternal punishment.

I would still make some application to us as disciples who are commissioned to follow Jesus in the harvest. The life of Christ in us is meant to bear fruit. John 15:8 is important. One sows, another reaps, all work together; but to slide through without trying is not living in accordance to the love and grace we have been shown. Making disciples, who make disciples is not our hobby; it is our business here on earth.

Our punishment as believers, if we live in disobedience and do not prepare for His return, is that we will stand before His judgment seat and see our life's work burned away. We will stand in shame before the One who endured the scourging and spitting of men and the wrath of His Father to bear our sin and give us His righteousness and life. (Heb. 12:1-13)

Psalm 31:1-8

What a powerful psalm this is. You feel David's desperation and great faith struggling side by side.

Vs. 1-2 In all of the years David was a shepherd, living on the hills with the sheep, he had no refuge. Now after the couple of years of fame after he killed Goliath, David is living on the move, in the mountains and in the wilderness, again, without shelter or refuge. What a brilliant way for the Lord to engineer the need for refuge into David's heart. This seeking of refuge in the Lord became one of David's passions and favorite expressions.

Vs. 3-5 While the first two verses were David's cry for help, these verses express what David knows to be true about God. David experienced salvation and knew he could entrust himself to God's care.

V. 5 Notice that Jesus says the first part of this verse as He dies. Not all of the words of this psalm can be attributed to what Jesus thought or felt on the cross, but many of these thoughts would have been what Jesus experienced. Read this psalm from Jesus' perspective as He is nailed to, hanging from, and taking His final breath, on the cross.

Vs. 6-8 Verse 6 could be looked at as saying that trusting in anything but God involves some sort of inappropriate trust in something else. David knew that God's *steadfast love* was directed toward him. God not only knew of his suffering, but God kept David 10 minutes ahead of the hounds.

Proverbs 8:1-11

When I read this every year, I wonder if my striving to follow, understand, gain wisdom and hear the Spirit is increasing. I know it is, but if I would have known how much grief it would have saved me, and how much more enjoyable it is to follow after God like this now, I would have made a bigger point of it back when I was twenty. Passion is great, but it can get you into a lot of trouble without the wisdom the Spirit gives. The trouble is, even with the Word sitting in your lap and the Spirit living in your heart, you have to want to dig, hear and submit.

FEBRUARY 8

Exodus 28

I know the only thing the guys will take away from this section is the invention of underwear in v. 42. They will note that they were boxers.

Vs. 1-5 Notice that everything was made with meaning and it looked good. It was to give glory and honor to both God and the priest who represented the people before God. These garments were to be worn only when they were serving God.

Vs. 6-14 In the making of the ephod, notice the stones that were to be placed on the shoulders. Aaron was to be burdened with the responsibility for the people.

Vs. 15-30 You can see by the amount of space given to the breastpiece, that it was very significant. For the second time the names of the tribes of Israel are carried on his person as part of his dress. Verses 29-30 are the key verses here. For the first time in the Bible *the Urim and the Thummim* are mentioned. They were probably stones used to inquire of God for making judgments and decisions. The German Bible calls them "light and right (justice or truth)," and you get the idea that using them was to find truth and righteousness in making decisions and giving judgments. The only place in the Bible you see them used in a significant way is with David when he was running from Saul. Notice that in these verses it says three times that Aaron was to have the people *on his heart*. God says, *Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly.*

The disciple of Jesus bears on his heart the reaching of the lost and the making of disciples for the next generation. It doesn't burden us with guilt, but with joy and excitement; because God and the Spirit are with us to bless us. The Lord sits at the right hand of God **praying for us and working with us**. We bear the name of Christ as His ambassadors, *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* (2 Cor. 5:20) In the grace of Jesus and the plan of God, it should weigh on us that there are so many who do not know Christ. To think of the danger they are facing should weigh upon our hearts. *And they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the Lord.* (Exodus 28:30)

Having a reason to get up every morning should empower us. All things are ours in Christ.

Vs. 31-35 What is significant about the robe is the bells and the pomegranates in vs. 33-34. This chiming sound would be made when the priest was before the Lord in the Holy Place filling the lampstand, putting incense on the altar of incense and replacing the bread of the Presence. The people would recognize the sound of the priests representing God for them, and it would heighten the awareness of the priest that he was standing before the throne of God just beyond the veil. Anyone entering the Holy Place without this attire would die.

Vs. 36-38 The priest was to represent the people before God realizing their (and his) guilt before God and their need for holiness and forgiveness. This would make the sacrifices acceptable to God.

It is interesting here too that the German Bible uses almost the same words for *Holy to the Lord* as in the Lord's Prayer, "make the name of God holy." I think that is a part of the intent of these words on Aaron's chest. He was to present the Lord as holy before Israel.

Vs. 40-43 They were to serve the people before God with dignity both in heart and in attire.



Matthew 25:31-26:13

It is hard to keep all of the events of Christ's second coming in order. The fact that there are so many opinions of what will happen makes this hard. Also, the fact that there is an element of the Tribulation, "Jacob's trouble," that is very specific to Israel makes this order of events a challenge. The entire Tribulation will last seven years.

A general order of events is as follows. First, Christ comes for the church. All the believers of the church age, from Jesus' resurrection to that point, will be resurrected; and those alive on earth will be taken to Christ and changed into their resurrection bodies. They will be in heaven during the Tribulation.

The Jews will become believing, and they will present the gospel all over the earth during the catastrophic events of the first 3.5 years.

At the midpoint of the 7 years, it seems that an army from the north will come against Jerusalem but be destroyed in the mountains around the Dead Sea. Then the antichrist will come to Jerusalem, kill the two witnesses, break the peace agreement with Israel, desecrate the temple and launch a full scale persecution of the Jews. Destroying the Jews won't be as easy as it sounds, since the world will be wrecked and it will get worse. Still, it will be the most violent persecution of the Jews and followers of Christ that has ever taken place.

At the end of the Tribulation as the nations gather north of Jerusalem, Christ will return to the Mount of Olives. There He will gather all the Jews worldwide and resurrect all the OT believers and head to the battle at Armageddon.

After this victory, Jesus will take His throne in the temple in Jerusalem. Then He will call all the people of all the nations to come before Him. This judgment will be on the non-Jewish world. Their faith in Christ was seen in their willingness to risk life and limb in hiding and helping the Jews and other followers of Christ during the Tribulation. This is the judgment of the sheep and the goats.

Matthew 25:31-46

Vs. 31-46 This judgment will take place immediately after the Tribulation as Jesus takes His throne for His thousand-year reign over the earth. Those who helped the Jews/saints proved their faith in God and will continue in the Millennium, but those who did not help the believers proved their rebellion to God. This means that the Millennium will be seeded and begun with only believers. After the 1000 years, even with Satan bound and removed, the sin of man, with no influence other than from within, will rise up against God so that when Satan is freed, he will find hearts ready for rebellion.

V. 42 Note that the goats are condemned by what they didn't do. Too often we think that sin is only seen in what is done. Not praising God, thanking Him, or following Him is also sin.

Did you notice the differences in verses 34 and 41, and for whom those places were prepared?

This parable makes it necessary for the rapture of the church to occur before the end of the Tribulation. If all believers were removed from the earth and given resurrection bodies at the end of the Tribulation, there would be no more sheep, only goats. The best time for the rapture of the church is at the beginning of the Tribulation. The entire Tribulation is called "Jacob's trouble," and it is the fulfilling of Israel's destiny. The church has no reason to be there.

Matthew 26:1-13

Vs. 1-2 Jesus is now ready for crucifixion, except for the institution of the symbol of the new covenant and the final discourse to the disciples in John 12-17. Notice how He warns the disciples again.

Vs. 3-4 This means they wanted to kill Jesus before the feast. They will get their wish.

Vs. 5-13 This is Jesus' preparation for burial by Mary. What is touching in this act of love is that Mary, the rich, aristocratic woman, learned to do this from the example of a woman who was a sinner and low in society. Mary identified herself with those who were low and sinful, pleading before the feet of the merciful Savior. In love, facing the scorn of the disciples no less, she poured out ointment worth a year's wage at minimum wage.

V. 8 I hate to say this, but it looks like all twelve disciples had been reading, "Religion for Idiots." In John 12 it says that Judas Iscariot led the charge on this and the others followed. John mentions that Judas was the treasurer and a thief.

Vs. 10-13 I wonder if any of the disciples were shamed and surprised by this rebuke from Jesus. This momentary sacrifice is, and has been, a memorial to her and to all disciples, who pour out their lives at the feet of their Savior in fragrant sacrifice, working in His harvest.

Psalm 31:9-18

As you read this, remember that this is the experience God gave to David to teach and train him. In this psalm you can also sense some of what Jesus experienced.

V. 9 I could understand Jesus feeling something like this on the cross.

V. 10 This wouldn't have applied to Jesus.

V. 11 As with the first part of this psalm from yesterday, I see this in Jesus' death. When I read, *those who see me in the street flee from me*, it also sounds like a part of Isaiah 53:3, *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*. I think of Jesus being led through the streets of Jerusalem, a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. So too, says Paul, are His disciples in 1 Corinthians 4:9, *For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men*.

Vs. 14-18 I really identify with the cry for help and the plea not to be put to shame. It takes courage to follow the Lord. A common fear is that God will let us down and we will be shown to be fools for trusting Him and His Word. When you see how Jesus was mocked as He hung on the cross, it appears that His adversaries had the victory and He was put to shame. But that was only for a moment and only revealed their hearts. As the old sermon says, "That was Friday, but Sunday's a comin'." As disciples, we should expect no less. We are not better than our Master. We will share both His humiliation and His vindication.

I like v. 16. David wasn't given a permanent deliverance for many years, but God did give him little ones to encourage him and strengthen his faith. Even in our circumstances we are blessed by God allowing His face to shine upon us.

Proverbs 8:12-13

You can't deny that God wants us to seek wisdom. It isn't just knowing the Word, but using what we learn in such a way as to live skillfully and understand life. Knowing the Lord should make us like the Lord. He is wise beyond all comprehension. God is not only saying it is OK to hate evil, pride, arrogance and perverted speech; He's saying that when we are wise, we will.

FEBRUARY 9

Exodus 29:1-30:10

There is a lot of detail today. It is fascinating at times to listen to someone, who really has a feel for all of this symbolism, describe what he thinks the symbols mean.

Generally speaking, as you read, look for major impressions and then look for some details that stand out to you.

What we are seeing is God describing the ceremony for the consecration of the priests, in this case, Aaron and his sons. Moses is still on the mountain. In order for them to represent the people before God, they themselves needed to be cleansed and prepared. There are aspects of this consecration that are looking ahead to Jesus. We'll see more of that when we read the book of Hebrews. The Father's preparation of the Son to be our Priest and Redeemer was more dramatic than what we'll read here. One notable difference, where there are no lines of correspondence between this ceremony and our Lord, is that He was sinless. No sin offering was necessary for Him, nor did He need to make yearly sacrifices of cleansing for Himself. He is the sinless priest who interceded for us and He is the pure sacrifice who stood in our place.

Exodus 29

Vs. 1-9 First, Aaron and his sons have to be washed and then dressed in their clothes. Notice that God promises that as long as there is an Israel, Aaron and his descendants will be the priests.

One thought here: How did the Father prepare the Son to be our priest? Were there clothes? Was there a ceremony? Think about the Christmas story and Hebrews 10:5.

Vs. 10-14 This is a sin offering to cleanse Aaron and his sons. Notice where you burned the sin offering that covered their sins. Read Hebrews 13:11-13. Pretty cool.

Vs. 15-18 This was a sacrifice symbolizing total dedication. Just as the animal was totally offered on the altar, Aaron and his sons were to be totally devoted to serving God. Look at Romans 12:1. When it says the aroma was pleasing, it was because of the total dedication of the worshiper. Later, when people with impure hearts give these offerings to God, He will say they stink.

After our sin has been forgiven, the next step is total devotion and offering to God.

Vs. 19-28 This third sacrifice symbolized their readiness to join God in ministry. They were cleansed of sin and fully devoted with all on the altar. Now their ears were dedicated to hearing God. The actions of their hands were dedicated to obeying and working for God, and the steps of their feet were dedicated to following God.

V. 21 Their nice new clothes were sprinkled in blood. Hebrews 9:22 says, *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

V. 24 The wave offering of the meat and bread was symbolic of them receiving from the Lord and offering it back. It was a fragrant aroma to God as they offered this back to God on the altar.

Vs. 26-28 And they were fed and blessed by God in their service with and for Him. This is actually a meal with God. They are now partners with Him in ministry.

Vs. 29-30 The office and the clothing would always belong to Aaron and his sons.

Vs. 31-34 This special meal of ordination could only be prepared a certain way and it could only be eaten by the priests that day. It could not be made into sandwiches the next day. It had to be consumed by eating in celebration of their ordination that day or by fire on the day after.

Vs. 35-37 This ceremony would take a week for the atoning and consecration of both the priests and the altar.

Vs. 38-46 Now this would be the primary responsibility of the service of the priest. They did a lot of stuff during the special days, but this would be every day. This was their main and most important ongoing service to the people. This sacrifice was each morning and evening. It wasn't

primarily for the covering of sins, but an offering of thanks to God. The elements of this sacrifice were all the things God had given them to sustain their lives: meat, flour, oil and wine.

V. 41 The acknowledgement of thanks and dependence on God would be a pleasing aroma to Him.

V. 42 The result is that God would meet with the priests and speak to them.

Vs. 43-46 And He would meet with His people and dwell with them.

For us following our Lord in the harvest, I think the preparation of the priests speaks to the heart of the disciple. We are cleansed because of Jesus; we lay our lives on the altar in full devotion and we are invited into ministry with God in the harvest. He shares the blessing with us as we hear, obey and follow. And our joy is the joy of our Savior, seeing people meet God, follow Him as disciples and dwell with Him forever.

Exodus 30:1-10

It is interesting that the altar of incense is first mentioned here. It was another of those responsibilities of the priests that had to be done twice a day. The lampstand in the Holy Place had to be supplied with oil morning and evening. But here we see this small pillar standing in the middle of the veil that would someday be torn when Jesus died. From this altar would be a continual column of incense rising up before God, symbolizing the prayer of the people. This was the place where the Christmas story really begins. The people are praying outside and Zechariah the priest goes in to add incense to this altar in the evening. On the right side of the altar he sees the angel Gabriel standing there saying to him, "Your prayers have been heard before God."

God built amazing symbols into the everyday life of the nation of Israel. These symbols would point to the coming and ministry of Jesus. Yet for us too, they still have something to say to us. As disciples in the harvest we are supposed to be constantly praying, not just for ourselves, but for the progress of the kingdom as the gospel of Christ reaches into the lives of the lost around us as we make disciples, who make disciples.

So far, the Lord has given Israel a prophet (Moses), a priest (Aaron & Sons), and symbols of perpetual light (the Word), perpetual provision and care (the bread), perpetual forgiveness (the daily sacrifices), and perpetual prayer (the incense). Then add to this that all the men were to appear before the Lord three times a year, personally bearing the testimony of redemption to their families, nation and neighbors. If Israel had truly followed God in faith and gratefulness, they would have been a blessed nation and a mighty witness for God. As disciples, this is an incredible picture of our lives in Jesus in the harvest. Instead of the temple and all the customs, we begin in the mornings (or whenever it works in the day) with our Bibles, in prayer, in faith and gratefulness, ready to follow Him into the harvest. We also have the church, a community of people to grow and work with in the harvest.

Matthew 26:14-46

Vs. 14-29 What is interesting is that Matthew/Mark/Luke record the actual giving of the Lord's Supper memorial. John gives the most comprehensive view, but doesn't give the exact words. The chronological events are as follows from Luke 22 and John 13: The supper and the partial institution of the Lord's Supper came first. Jesus had the disciples divide His cup among themselves to be drunk later, and then He broke the bread signifying His body. He mentioned that His betrayer was at the table and next came the fight over who would be first. Jesus washed the disciples' feet, mentioned to John the identity of the betrayer, gave the morsel to Judas, Satan entered Judas and he left. With that final morsel the supper was over and Judas was gone. Then Jesus promised a blessing on those who had continued with Him and He drank the cup with them

that had already been poured out, that signified the blood of the new covenant. Then came the upper room discourse (Jn. 14-17), most of which was given as they walked toward the Mount of Olives. Finally Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples.

This means that Judas was at the initial part of the Lord's Supper and then had his feet washed. Jesus showed him love and gave him opportunity to change his mind, right up to the end. What blows me away is that Jesus' behavior toward Judas never changed, so that the disciples had no clue it was him.

V. 18 Jerusalem was flooded with people during the Passover. It is a miracle that they found this room. It is thought that this was also the room they were in after the resurrection and on the day of Pentecost. The theory is that it belonged to the family of John Mark, the writer of the next Gospel.

V. 26 It is interesting that we are reading of God making the Old Covenant with Israel, as we are reading here of Jesus making the New Covenant with His blood.

Vs. 30-35 This is an important event, especially for Peter. Jesus was telling them what would happen. They would leave Him, but it was already predicted. This wasn't as much a warning as an encouragement to them not to feel too defeated when they did this. Rather, Jesus focused them forward. In v. 32 He mentions that when He is risen, He'll meet them in Galilee. The weight of Jesus' words is on them meeting Him in Galilee. He passes over the "risen" part and emphasizes the meeting in Galilee. I wonder why. What was so important? We'll see.

Vs. 36-46 This is Jesus' understanding and dealing with what He would have to endure on the cross.

V. 38 That distinctly human part of us, the soul, was reacting to the thought of death. Jesus was fully man in body and soul and fully God in spirit, fully joined and fully one. He was the God man.

Jesus' submission to the Father is a model to every disciple.

V. 41 This temptation probably had to do with the fear and flight that would dominate all of the disciples in a short time.

Psalm 31:19-24

What an amazing lesson of praise from David. To be able to sing this kind of praise and have this kind of testimony, you have to face all the negative, the threats and the anxiety, crying out to God.

Vs. 19-20 Laura pointed out to me this morning the words of Exodus 29:46, *And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.* God has always meant to dwell with us. It makes sense that His goodness is stored up for those who fear Him and take their refuge in Him.

Vs. 21-22 David could only learn v. 21 by living through v. 22, hoping in God and crying out to Him. God has no other way to teach us so that the lesson is written on our hearts.

Vs. 23-24 It is worth waiting on the Lord to have this burned across your heart and become your testimony to others. Wait on the Lord.

Proverbs 8:14-26

It seems to me that God is saying we should really, really be seeking wisdom. What parent or spouse couldn't use more wisdom? James says that if anyone lacks wisdom they should ask God. Paul says we are to know what the will of the Lord is, like we should really be able to

understand. I guess it's all in the Word. All we need to add is time and desire to read what He says and do it.

The words here also suggest why we don't seek wisdom. We don't value it more than we value other stuff. I think I'm finally beginning to get this message.

Finally, notice that the wisdom of God is seen in creation. Intelligent design is not only something God expects us to notice, but His wisdom in creation is meant to make our hearts secure and trustful. God's wisdom in creation is a major factor in the book of Job and in His rebuke of Job. It is as if God is saying, "You don't understand what has happened or why, but you see My power and wisdom in creation, so trust Me."

FEBRUARY 10

Exodus 30:11-31:18

Exodus 30:11-38

Vs. 11-16 In the whole scheme of things this mention of giving a ransom for the men 20 years and older for the coming census seems to be an element that is out of place. God has just told Moses about the altar of incense. My suggestion is that this atonement has to do with the men's sense of humility and need before God when they pray. In Israel, when the priest added the incense in the evening, the men (and women) would be standing outside praying. They would need to remember they were a people, humbled and ransomed before God. Their strength was not in their numbers, but in their God and His salvation.

V. 12 The element of humility was very important in Israel. Notice how this verse ends and then think about the plague that God brings against Israel when David numbers the people in order to glory in (be proud of) the size of Israel's army. (2 Sam. 24:10-25)

This ransom money was to be given when God took a census of the people. That didn't happen often. Between now and Joshua (40 years) there will be two censuses. These instructions may only have been given for this occasion.

The payment was a sign and reminder that all were guilty before God. The half shekel was a ransom payment, releasing them from God's punishment. In Jesus' day this seems to become the temple tax. In the NT we've read the story in Matthew 17:24-27, where Peter is confronted by the IRS about this tax and Jesus tells Peter to go fishing.

All the tithes and taxes were to pay for the ministry of the priests and Levites, and for maintenance. The priests represented the people before God. The Levites were to serve in the temple and to educate the people, becoming the first Sunday school teachers.

Vs. 17-21 This was another symbol. It was another provision and warning for Aaron and his sons. There was to be a huge basin of water between the altar and the tabernacle where they could wash before they entered the Holy Place and served the Lord. The symbolic emphasis was that they were to be holy inwardly. Symbolic though this was, nevertheless, it was a grave warning that God would judge them.

In our service as disciples, our holiness and cleansing is important also. The difference is that we don't do this out of fear of punishment, because this washing takes place in the love and grace of Christ as we read the Word and the Spirit touches our hearts. We need that "washing" every day. Actually, today's psalm has something to do with this.

Vs. 22-38 In this section God gives Moses the mixture for both the anointing oil and the incense. Here, God is introducing the concept of patent protection. No, just kidding, but God wasn't. The fragrance of this anointing oil and incense would only be associated with God and worship and sacrifice. God, as a good educator, is not only covering things conceptually, and not only

culturally (the feasts, etc.), and not only visually, but now also through the association of this particular smell and God's holiness and their redemption in the activities in the tabernacle.

Exodus 31

Vs. 1-11 God not only sought out skilled men, but He skilled them to do this work. He gave them wisdom and creativity for this task. The same is true of us. Paul's words are as gripping today as when he said, *For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?* (RSV, *as if it were not a gift*) 1 Corinthians 4:7

Interestingly, the men who built the tabernacle and all of this also perished in the wilderness because of their rebellion. God isn't impressed with our work or our skill. He wants our hearts.

Vs. 12-18 More laws will follow, but this is an important spot. God gives them a sign of this covenant. This sign shows they, as a nation, were separated from all races for the Lord's special purpose. It was based on God's work in creation, recounting the six days of work and His rest and enjoyment on the 7th day. Oddly, this is evidence that the six days of creation were literal 24-hour days.

When it says they shouldn't do any work, it literally means work, or, that which you did to sustain your livelihood and take care of the cares of life. If you think of this in terms of what Jesus warns about as He teaches the disciples in the Beatitudes, you get the picture. They were not to care for their lives, but to seek first the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear they could help others in showing mercy. It was to be a day of reflection on the creation, glory and goodness of God. There was plenty they could do on the Sabbath, but it was a day of trusting God and kicking back in thankfulness.

As disciples, whether on Sunday or some other day, we need to stop and chill and reflect on the creation, glory and goodness of God in Christ. From the outside, Israel keeping the Sabbath looked silly, but reflection made them stronger. The same is true for us.

Matthew 26:47-68

Vs. 47-56 This is Judas' betrayal, Peter's attempt to be an action hero and Jesus' arrest. There is a lot packed into these verses. Enjoy what you get out of them.

V. 48 It was dark, so Judas identified Jesus by a sign, a kiss, which meant, "When I embrace this guy, grab Him!"

V. 51 Luke, thankfully, tells us Jesus healed the ear.

V. 53 Jesus could have gotten out of this. *Twelve legions of angels* would have been about 72,000. I'd say that might have done the job.

Vs. 55-56 Jesus took command of the situation and created a distraction, so Peter & Co. were not whacked.

Vs. 57-68 We find out in John, that Peter was let into the courtyard because John knew the high priest.

V. 63 *But Jesus remained silent.* This is what Isaiah said would happen in Isaiah 53:7.

This is utterly ironic and sad. *And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."* Did he really want a true answer?

V. 64 *Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* "You have said so," meant yes. If this was poker, you would say that Jesus "sees and raises" him, on this

challenge, not only admitting He is the Son of God, but He also says He is the Son of Man, from Daniel 7.

Vs. 67-68 I remember when I read this the first time. When they put the potato sack over Jesus' head and hit Him and taunted Him it made me cringe. I would not have wanted to have been one of those guys. The sobering thing is that at one time, before I knew Christ, I could have seen myself doing something like this.

Psalm 32

Vs. 1-2 In these verses David declares the truth of being blessed. In the rest of the psalm, David tells you how to get there. David is teaching, in the form of this blessing, what he personally discovered in his relationship with the Lord. He had a lot for which to be forgiven; in fact, David was guilty of a crime for which there was no offering. He was pardoned by God's grace and mercy. Paul quotes this psalm in Romans 4:6. What I find interesting is the link between receiving God's forgiveness or deliverance, and teaching it to others. That is just like a disciple.

Vs. 3-5 This was David's personal battle with his own unconfessed sin. I think we can all feel the weight of this. This was probably something that happened before his sin with Bathsheba.

V. 6 is an exhortation and a warning.

V. 7 This is one of the hallmarks of David's relationship with God. He sought God to dwell with God.

Vs. 8-11 Based on David's personal experience, he is advising those who follow God to do the same.

Proverbs 8:27-32

If we marvel at the creation, we are also marveling at the wisdom of God. In the German Bible, when it says that God gave skill to the men who made the tabernacle, it says that God gave them wisdom. Deep within everything God does creatively is an incredible, unfathomable wisdom. This same wisdom is available to us as God appeals to us to live our lives in following and obeying Him.

FEBRUARY 11

Exodus 32-33

Why does the golden calf have to be on my birthday? That day was not a great day for this young nation. Yet, as we will see so often, after a crisis, something good will come. That good thing comes because some follower of God is moved by what happens and lays their heart out before God. We will see this over and over. This becomes a noticeable pattern, only because God is gracious and because some believer is there who loves God. Where this "believer" is absent, the crisis only escalates. Where this person is present, we see God's glory.

Exodus 32

Vs. 1-6 The people demanded an idol. Even though idolatry can be seen in Jacob's family in Canaan, in Egypt Israel had become trained in worshiping idols and imagining that divinity was in that statue. Inherent in idolatry is having a god we can control. It is of our making and we feel comfortable with its limitations and demands. This is not only satanic deception and human manipulation, but more than all, it is the power of sin.

The power of sin defies all intellect and reason, all compassion and desire. Reading this story you have to remember there was still fire at the top of the mountain. There was still a pillar of cloud and fire, and there was still manna every morning. Two to three million people were encamped around Mt. Sinai and the nation of Egypt was in ruins. The people had witnessed the

greatest miracles of all time; they had heard the voice of God and they were given the Ten Commandments. So, why did they do this? How could Aaron have let them do it? What does Satan use best, atheism or confused spirituality? Clearly - confused spirituality. What does sin use best? Everything.

As disciples, we need to take care. That same depraved nature is in us. The difference is that we have been given hearts cleansed in Christ and infused with a new life in the Spirit. Our strength is our total dependence on the Spirit and the Word and the grace of God. We are strongest following Christ in the harvest, focused on God's grace, our redemption and the need of this world. As Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." We can never forget that we are spiritually bi-polar. We need our daily time (meds) with God in His Word.

Vs. 2-5 I wonder if Aaron was afraid. Not only did Aaron design and make the calf, but he organized the worship. Maybe he was trying to keep the people from a full scale riot.

V. 6 The last part of this verse is quoted in 1 Corinthians 10:7, *The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play*. The word "play" in this context would be sexual immorality. I don't know if sex and idolatry were always mixed everywhere, but they definitely were mixed in Canaan. It was the perfect way for man to degrade himself in every way. I think it makes the enemy happy.

Vs. 7-14 This is a very important interaction between God and Moses. God expressed His anger with the people, but this was for Moses and for all of Israel to understand Him. God knew what Moses would say and how this would be necessary for Israel.

V. 10 God had already shown the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. What God says here was a "test" for Moses; but God knew he would not only pass, but step up to a higher level of seeking God.

Vs. 11-14 This is why Moses was such a great man. It was love for God and for His people. Notice that after the logical argument of v. 12, Moses reminds God of His covenant with Abraham, stating that that covenant was without condition. God swore by His own self. It means that the covenant with Abraham, in some hearts of faith, was fully understood as eternally binding on God.

There is a line of thinking called the "openness of God." The idea is that God can change His mind and plans based on new data or the unexpected actions of men. Passages like this one are often used by critics to show that God does change His mind, that His plans are not set and that He doesn't know the end from the beginning. God does know the end from the beginning and these verses do not disprove that. It is important to let Scripture interpret Scripture; that is, we need to take what the Bible says as a whole, and balance it against what we might read in one or two verses that seem to say something different. The message of the entire Bible is that God knows the end, and the tiny details thereof, from the beginning. For example:

Psalm 139:4 *Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.*

Psalm 139:16 *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

In light of God's foreknowledge and His unchangeableness, how do you interpret what God says to Moses in this portion? Most people see this as a test for Moses and a way to display the shepherd's heart that God had developed in Moses during those 40 years in the wilderness of Midian tending sheep.

Vs. 15-20 Now Moses is mad. When he was on the mountain talking to God, the issue was still theoretical for him. When Moses came down and saw the people, it aroused his own sense of justice and zeal for God.

Vs. 15-16 Moses is coming down the mountain with these amazing tablets on which God Himself had inscribed the Ten Commandments. The commandments were the summary of the covenant that God was making with the nation; that is, obey and be blessed.

V. 18 This is all so ironic. It was a sound like joy, but it was defeat. There was nothing wrong with singing and dancing. There was the idolatry, but also in v. 25 it says they *had broken loose*. There was something that happened here that was a moral and social breakdown.

V. 19 I don't fully understand why Moses broke the tablets. I would imagine that when Moses saw the extent of what had happened and how many of the commandments had been broken, he realized the people had already broken the covenant with God; and in his despair and anger, he broke the tablets.

V. 20 By Moses doing this he showed that he, a man, was showing the powerlessness of their "god."

Vs. 21-24 Everyone always notices how Aaron tries to pawn this off on the people and chance. *I threw it (gold) into the fire and out came this calf*. And to think that Aaron would become the high priest of these people. God will change Aaron through this event and it will show God's patience and grace.

Notice that Moses gives Aaron the responsibility. If Aaron had led, he might have stopped the people from bringing sin upon themselves. He should at least have tried to stand in the way.

Vs. 25-29 There was such disorder that whatever order had existed up until now had crumbled. This will actually be a big event in the history of Israel, because when Moses called, all of the Levites came to him. It doesn't mean that some people from other tribes didn't come, but no other tribe, lock, stock and barrel, completely gave themselves to the Lord like this. This then is the selection and ordination of the tribe of the Levites to be the servants and teachers of the people in the worship of God.

V. 25 Notice Moses' word about giving their enemies something to laugh at. I wonder if spiritual enemies were also in view. God is making a nation to be a witness to the nations. It has only been 40 days since they made a covenant with God. Satan is going, "Seriously, dude, this is too easy."

V. 27 The Levites help Moses dispense justice. Apparently whatever happened as a result of this idolatry was measurable. It appears that most of the people joined in the worship, but only these 3000 were found having committed adultery or murder or rape or whatever. This judgment probably reflects a violation of commandments 6-10.

Vs. 30-34 Now that Moses himself has seen what the people have done, he pleads again for them. This is why Moses was a great man and follower of God. This entire section will explain something in the next chapter about why the people worshiped God when Moses went to the tent of meeting.

V. 32 The book seems to be a concept they already had regarding who would be acceptable to God and live with Him. Now it *might* have been the book of the census they were going to be taking, or it could also be that in these months they had already been compiling a written record of the people and their ages. However, it seems that since God wrote the book, it is the Book of Life, meaning that the line of faith from Adam to Moses already understood that God was keeping a record and only those who were in the book would live with Him. Note that Moses is willing to stand in the gap and take the place of the people.

V. 33 God says that only those who sinned will be punished.

V. 34 This is God promising to continue to lead Israel. God is saying that Moses would lead the people to the place He promised, but that was still 10 or more months away.

V. 35 I would guess that the plague was aimed at those who had instigated the worship or were guilty of what the 3000 had done, that Moses and the Levites had missed. This will begin to show the people, that the sins of a few affect the entire congregation.

Exodus 33

Vs. 1-6 After this event, God tells Moses to go with the people; but that He, Himself, will not dwell in the middle of the people because if His holiness came in contact with their sin, they would go, "Boom!"

This statement by God launched another crisis, and the people mourned when they heard it. They were beginning to understand that their sin and disobedience was a major issue. God was not an idol or a religion. He was a Person to be dealt with in a relationship.

Vs. 7-11 All of this disaster brought this custom into being. God said He would not come among the people, and so Moses had to go outside the camp to meet with God and intercede for the people. The people worshipped, knowing that their sin was separating them from God and that Moses was going out there to ask for mercy for the people. Again, this is another "good" thing that came from the malfunction with the calf.

This tent was not the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is built, it will be exactly in the middle of the people with God's presence in the tabernacle. All of what is happening here is leading up to that.

V. 11 It is interesting that Joshua basically lived there, making sure, I suppose, that no one from the people tried to sneak in to get a peek.

This whole adventure led to a crisis and Moses and the people knew it. If God could not and would not dwell in their midst, they were cooked. For Moses especially, the load was unbearable, and he needed God's presence and assurance.

Vs. 12-23 Now we get an idea of those first conversations Moses had with God in that tent. This is a very important and interesting portion of Scripture, especially for us as disciples.

V. 13 What was Moses asking for, another miracle? The people had seen miracle upon miracle with no real change of heart. Moses didn't need to see another miracle. Moses wanted to know God. In my mind, this passage makes Moses great.

Vs. 14-17 Even when God promises that His presence will go with Moses and that He will give him rest, Moses doesn't stop.

V. 18 In his weakness Moses could have asked for anything, but in v. 18 he says, *Please show me your glory*. His deepest desire and need was that he wanted to know God personally. He didn't want to have to rely on the ups and downs of experience and events. He needed something more stable and unchanging than successes and his own feelings. He needed to see and know the heart of God. In God showing Moses His innermost heart, Moses knew he was welcomed in and accepted. What will happen will not make Moses perfect, but it will increase his faith. There is something in this that also happened to the prophet Elisha.

Vs. 19-23 Notice that whatever is promised here is different than when Moses and the others ate with the Lord. What Moses is about to see is different. Also, this is not simply sight. There is a very personal thing happening that will give Moses the ability to lead another 38 years. It isn't visual; it is spiritual. Moses asks to see God's glory, and God tells Moses three things will happen. How do those three things represent God's glory? More on this tomorrow when it actually happens.

For us as disciples, as we yearn to serve Christ in the harvest, what is it that we really want? It takes a long time to finally distill the pure desire out of us and our motives. We work and see

successes and failures and realize that none of them last or change us in a way that lasts. What Moses asked for was the only thing that truly makes sense. We need to know the Lord, to see His heart and be welcomed into His heart. This was Paul's desire in Philippians 3. If our service depends on results, we are dead. If our mood and faithfulness depend on visual results, we fail. When we serve, knowing and seeing the Lord as our love and treasure, fully welcomed and beloved, we follow with joy and faithfulness regardless of what the voices of men say to us, or what the "results" look like.

Not that this portion has anything to do with me, but I'm glad I can latch onto this truth on my birthday. I don't want my relationship with God to be through bowing to the "calf" of results or what others think of me. If I get to blow out the candles, this will be my wish, *Show me Your glory*.

Matthew 26:69-27:14

Matthew 26:69-75

Nothing is more haunting than Luke's account of Peter's denial, where in the middle of Jesus' ordeal, there is a break in the action and Jesus hears the rooster and looks out to the courtyard. His eyes meet Peter's, knowing that Peter has just publicly "sworn to God" that he doesn't know Jesus. Poor Peter. Like every great leader, before he became useful, he had to hit the wall at 500 mph and become broken.

Matthew 27:1-14

Vs. 1-5 As they led Jesus away, Judas now understood that Jesus would be killed and that the people would blame him. Used by Satan to achieve Satan's ends to have the Jews incur the guilt of killing their Messiah, Judas had not achieved his end. What would 30 pieces of silver get you? It couldn't have been the money. Maybe he thought he could corner Jesus, and Jesus would finally have to show His power and destroy the Romans. Judas might have escaped the wrath of the people by committing suicide, but not God. The minute he croaked, he was standing before God. What was he thinking? But Judas wasn't the only one who made mistakes. Satan never understood the mystery of the incarnation or the mystery of that strange, funky nation that would be formed at the resurrection of Christ, bound by no common language, race or boundary, bound only by the cleansing, justifying, sanctifying blood of Christ and His indwelling Spirit. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.

And to make Satan's defeat complete, by God's grace, Israel will rise and fulfill its destiny and burn brightly for its Messiah in earth's darkest hour. *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.* (Daniel 12:3)

Vs. 6-8 You don't find anything more irrational or ironic than this. They paid Judas to betray Jesus to His death. That was OK. But to use this *blood money* for religious purposes was, according to their "law," sinful. So they bought a field for the burials of foreigners.

Vs. 9-10 This is referring to a prophecy in Zechariah 11:12-13 almost verbatim. So what does this have to do with Jeremiah? Jeremiah 19 refers to the plot of ground, *the potter's field*. This field would insure the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Zechariah describes the price of the betrayal. Here, the field and coming judgment are what's in view.

Vs. 11-14 Pilate really lived in the Roman capital of Judea in Caesarea, on the coast. He came to Jerusalem during the feasts because of the risk of riots and to enjoy the festivities.

You really have to put all of the gospels together to understand Jesus' interaction with Pilate. For his part, Pilate tried all sorts of chess moves on the Jews to release Jesus. He finally caved into

personal fear when the Jews threatened to tell Caesar on him. Pilate gave in. He didn't have to. Rather than being trapped in playing chess, there is that one unexpected, invincible move where you simply throw the board into the air and say, "This is what I'm going to do regardless of the cost." And you obey God. It sure simplifies things.

Psalm 33:1-11

This is a great psalm of praise. Notice that there is no mention of distress or danger or crying out. That is all behind David as he wrote this.

V. 1 Notice that praise is native and natural to the upright. How do you know if a person is upright? They are praising God.

V. 3 So where does that *new song* come from? And when does it arrive on our lips? It isn't natural and it comes at a price. Read Psalm 40:1-10. If the Lord hasn't fully led a person through their pit and bog, He still has hasn't put the new song in their mouth.

Vs. 4-11 Notice the words used for the Word of the Lord. Notice too that the creation is evidence of God's eternal power and divine control. *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:20)

Proverbs 8:33-36

V. 33 This is a command. It is something we are to actively seek and pursue in all situations. It is a part of prayer and our relationship with God.

V. 34 And here is the blessing for those who do it.

Vs. 35 & 36 are a very powerful contrast, and v. 36 is a truth that most people will not realize until it is way too late.

FEBRUARY 12

Exodus 34:1-35:9

Exodus 34

Vs. 1-4 I've never fully understood Moses' anger in breaking the first tablets. Moses' anger gets him in trouble later. But here I find it sort of funny that God tells Moses to cut two more stone tablets for the next morning, and Moses just went out and did it. I wouldn't know where to begin. I suppose today we could run out to Home Depot© and get a couple of patio stones.

Vs. 5-9 Moses asked to see God's glory. Moses sees some of God, hears God say His name and then repeat His name describing His great love on those who receive that love, and His wrath on those who reject His love. This isn't just God declaring some information about Himself; it is God revealing Himself. He does it in such a way that Moses is strengthened to his core and assured of God's nature. God is "feasting" Moses on who He is and why He does what He does. It is like living in a kingdom for years hearing about the king and observing his decrees and laws and works and only knowing him on that basis. Now you are invited to live with him, talk to him at breakfast, informal, fully visible and transparent, like a friend. Your understanding of everything would become exponentially deeper and wiser. Verses 6 & 7 become a refrain mentioned again and again as to the nature of God. Along with the name, "I AM," comes the spiritual insight into His heart.

Notice in the description of God in 6 & 7, how long it takes to get to punishment. The generational aspect is hard for us to swallow until we've read the entire Bible and see what God says to Ezekiel and Jeremiah regarding the sons not being punished for the sins of the fathers. We've already read Abe's talk with the Lord regarding finding a few who were righteous in

Sodom. No one who sincerely comes to God in repentance is ever turned away. Everyone who seeks, finds. Yet, there is a kind of sin that becomes deeply inbred in a culture and within generations. When this sin becomes "truth" in that family or culture, God acts against it. This kind of cultural sin gets remembered and visited after God's deep patience wears out. This is what is going to happen to the land of Canaan in about 38 years.

As Moses experiences this intimacy with God, this understanding of God's heart, he pleads with God to dwell in the middle of His people. In fact, the tabernacle will become the center of the camp of Israel. As disciples, this presence is ours because of the Holy Spirit. If we don't experience that closeness, it usually means we are keeping other things closer to us than we are keeping Christ and His mission. Jesus said to His disciples, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." As disciples, we need to let Paul's pursuit of knowing Christ be our model.

Philippians 3:10-15, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Vs. 10-17 Much of what is written here intensifies the Ten Commandments and the special position of the people as God's own possession. Some of this seems to be a restatement from the last time Moses was on the mountain. What encourages your heart, as a disciple, from this section?

Notice the contrast between v. 10 and vs. 11-17. The covenant and relationship is with God. They would know others and do business with others, but God should have their hearts and full devotion. They were on earth for a purpose. Verse 10 suggests that as they obeyed God, the blessing of God would draw the attention of all peoples to the possibility of having this kind of relationship to the Creator and only God. Even for us as disciples, it is easy to have our desires and affections drawn away from God and connected to other things. Being in the harvest helps keep our vision clear.

Vs. 18-26 These were all the ways that Israel would refresh their love for the Lord and keep their focus on His love.

Vs. 18-20 This was the Passover and *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, reminding them of God's salvation and redemption.

V. 21 All nations would think they were nuts, but Israel would enjoy a day of rest reflecting on God's love. And why rest on that one day? Because their God, the Creator of the universe and mankind, created in six days and rested on the seventh.

Vs. 22-24 This *Feast of Weeks* and firstfruits is Pentecost in May-June (7 weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread) and then the Feast of Tabernacles and ingathering of the harvest (along with the Day of Atonement) in October. All the males in Israel had to show up for these three feasts and stay the entire week for each feast. Imagine how all the nations would think this was crazy. But it would focus the eyes and hearts of the men on the grace of God, and God promised to protect their homes and fields while they were away in Jerusalem.

Vs. 25-26 In sacrificing, the people would always remember the day of the Passover (no leaven). They would remember that God gave them their food in the firstfruits, and they would remember to resist copying the rituals of the surrounding nations (goat and the mother's milk).

Vs. 27-28 Moses was up there another 40 days. This time the people behaved.

Vs. 29-35 When Moses returned, the Lord gave Moses a visible sign or symbol of what happens while standing in the presence of God. Everyone examined Moses and they were afraid. This continued those 40 years, and Moses got "re-charged" every time he went into the tent of meeting to speak with God.

V. 35 Notice that when Moses spoke with the people he wouldn't replace the veil until he was done.

So, what do you get from this? There are a couple good discipleship principles here. None of us "glow" literally, but isn't there something that happens if we live closely in His presence in the harvest?

There's a story about a pastor who visited someone who used to be working hard in the harvest, but had become distant and isolated from the church. After they talked for a while, the conversation died and they both sat silent in front of the fireplace.

Finally the pastor got up without saying a word, grabbed the tongs, removed a burning log off the fire and stood it on its end in the fireplace, but away from the other burning logs. He took his seat and neither man spoke. As they watched, the log he had removed stopped burning and began smoldering. The log was almost completely out when the pastor rose again and placed the log on top of the other burning logs. After a short time, the log began to burn again.

As the story goes, the pastor rose without saying a word, showed himself to the door and left. The next Sunday the man was in church.

Exodus 35:1-9

Vs. 1-3 At this point, it is time for God to restate the covenant He and the people have entered into. The sign of this covenant is the Sabbath. This restating of the Sabbath might seem hard, but there are two things that stand out to me. First, God has just shown them incredible mercy and grace in light of their falling away and idolatry. Second, the Sabbath was rest, not punishment. It was a time to reflect on their blessings and mission as a nation, resting in the privilege and provision of an awesome God. I'm willing to bet that the kindling of fire was ok if it meant keeping warm or tending to the sick. Since the Sabbath wasn't a day of fasting, meal preparation was allowed; but if you used the day to get ahead in cooking or washing, it was wrong.

Vs. 4-9 Now it's time to begin working on the tabernacle, the center of their worship of God. We'll see how the people respond.

Matthew 27:15-31

Vs. 15-25 Pilate was playing a losing game with the Jews, thinking he would win at setting Jesus free. The word he received from his wife only intensified the eerie irrationality the other Gospels say Pilate was experiencing. Pilate was working frantically to let Jesus go, but caved in to the Jews when they pulled their trump card. If you put all of the gospels together, Jesus was actually beaten twice. Pilate had Him beaten before presenting Him on the balcony, thinking that everyone would pity Him, and that that humiliation would be enough and he could let Him go.

Notice in vs. 22 and 23 that "all" of the people were shouting this. The shout was only one word, "Crucify."

The statement in v. 25 is one of the most ironic statements in the Bible. Wayne Watson has a song called, "The Hunger," where this statement is seen first, from the guilt of demanding Jesus' blood, to the cry for salvation that comes from that blood. Interesting song.

That generation of men and women would pay for this. In 70 A.D. the Romans would destroy Jerusalem and the temple. It is interesting to me that God is so slow to punish. Many of these

same people would hear Peter's message in about 50 days and be cut to the heart, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. Others would resist the grace of God and be massacred by the Romans in about 40 years.

Vs. 26-31 This was the pre-crucifixion beating. Just think, Jesus endured this willingly because He had to go through this to get to the cross for us.

A disciple is no better than his master. Saved by His blood, are we willing to pay this price to see the lost saved? The irony here is that Jesus was selected to die, over a murderer.

Psalm 33:12-22

Read v. 12 and then Exodus 34:10. Cool, huh?

Vs. 13-17 Israel is God's nation and all the other nations are distant from Him. These verses seem to say that although Israel is God's heritage and instrument to reach the other nations, the Lord is still sovereign over **all** nations, watching and directing them as necessary.

Vs. 18 & 19 are great. This is what gives you confidence as a disciple to live dangerously in the hands of God.

Vs. 20-22 I can imagine this being Moses' prayer from yesterday, for God's presence and glory and help. Notice again, the waiting on the Lord. It is as if to say, "Let others do what they will and seek help where they will. Our souls wait on the Lord."

What a great declaration of confidence in the glory of God.

Proverbs 9:1-6

This is interesting, because this appeal of "lady" wisdom seems similar to the appeal of the wild adulteress to the simple, young fool in Proverbs 7:6-27. Apparently there is hope, even for the simple, if he makes the right decision.

FEBRUARY 13

Exodus 35:10-36:38

Exodus 35:10-35

Lots of observations here, but I'll only make a few.

Vs. 10-19 Being a pastor, I always wonder how Moses did this logistically. God had already told Moses which men had been especially gifted for the work of construction. Did they hold meetings? How did Moses communicate the detailed designs he was given? Did they have a white board or did they each have little stone tablets?

Vs. 20-29 The people gave willingly and eventually had to be restrained in their giving. They also gave willingly to make the calf. Giving doesn't tell the entire story, nor is it a sure sign of spiritual maturity.

The caution I see in all of this, for us as disciples, is that if they had sought the Lord and waited on Him, they would have gotten what they wanted, a place and symbol of worship. God was already giving the plan to Moses as they were pressing Aaron to allow them to go bovine. As often as I have heard preachers "wax elephants" on this story, talking about the willing heart of the people, as Paul/Spirit reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10, all of these people who were giving (except a couple) rebelled and died in the wilderness. Sin is incurable and the heart is deceitful beyond all things. Our religious routines and sacrifices do not mean spiritual maturity and can be used by us to gain our own ends and pacify our guilt. Our only hope is to keep our hearts soaked daily in the Word and to set our hearts on closely, humbly following the Spirit.

Vs. 30-35 Apparently Bezalel was the main leader and artist of the tabernacle. The "he" of chapter 36 probably refers to Bezalel. Bezalel taught himself and Oholiab to make what needed to be made, and these two men led and guided all the men and women who worked on the tabernacle.

One point of trivia in v. 30 is that the title, *son of Hur*, would have been pronounced "Ben Hur." You were wondering where they got the title for that movie, right? You'll notice in the movie, Ben Hur is of the tribe of Judah.

Exodus 36

Vs. 1-7 Notice that after commissioning Bezalel and Oholiab, the first order of business was to get the people to stop bringing stuff. Apparently it was interrupting the work.

Vs. 8-38 There is a great amount of detail and care given to what was done in building this place of worship. What do you think God is trying to say to us?

V. 35 This refers to the veil that stood before the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies), in the Holy Place. The tabernacle was one tent divided into two rooms. One was called the Holy Place, where the lampstand, altar of incense and table of the bread of the Presence stood. As you entered this tent, straight ahead was the altar of incense, and just inches beyond that altar was the veil. Beyond that veil was the Most Holy Place. The ark of the covenant was in the Most Holy Place, holding the Ten Commandments, and the top of the ark was the mercy seat, symbolically, the throne of God.

The priests entered the Holy Place twice every day, but the high priest only entered the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement when he made sacrifice for the sins of the people/nation. This veil separated the people from the presence of God. It was only by going through this veil that forgiveness for the people and nation could be made. This is the making of that veil. Now notice what happens in the NT reading for today.

The tabernacle would be completed about a year after the Exodus.

Matthew 27:32-66

For us as disciples, this is hallowed ground. All that Jesus endured and suffered for our salvation comes to a focus on the cross, as He is cursed and punished by His Father, for our sins.

V. 32 Jerusalem was filled with people who had come to the Passover. This man, Simon, was a Jew from Cyrene in North Africa. Talk about being in the wrong place at the right time. Mark 15:21 mentions that two of Simon's sons became known in the church. They apparently all became believers. Also, see Acts 13:1 where one of these sons is there in that prayer meeting when the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Also, the Jewish believers from Cyrene were some of the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

V. 34-37 This gall was like morphine; it numbed the mind and the pain. Jesus wanted, and chose, to stay lucid.

V. 37 Usually the charge was written on this plaque. In this case it was ironic for two reasons. First, Pilate was lashing out at the Jews for threatening him with blackmail if he didn't crucify Jesus. Second, the title was the charge against Jesus and it was true. He was guilty of being the Messiah, the coming Son of Man.

V. 38 This is Isaiah 53:9.

Vs. 39-43 To understand this in a deeper way, read Psalm 22 again.

V. 44 At this early point in those six hours on the cross, the thieves also joined in. Toward the end, Luke tells us that one of those thieves repented and was saved.

Vs. 45-50 This is also in Psalm 22. Note that the bystanders tried to prolong Jesus' life/death to see if Elijah would come. Ironically, the only way Jesus died was that He allowed Himself to die. He had the power at any time to save Himself, but He submitted Himself to the Father's will to be poured out as a sacrifice for our sins.

Vs. 51-54 Notice v. 51 and think about what you just read in the OT portion...pretty cool, huh?

Notice the time when vs. 52-53 actually take place. They couldn't rise until He did. Just as Jesus was the "firstfruits" of those risen from the dead, there was this "token" resurrection of some of those whose graves were in Jerusalem.

V. 54 The centurions were always good guys.

Vs. 55-56 At the time of Jesus' death these women were standing at a distance. There were a lot of Mary's. Matthew doesn't mention that the women were earlier standing under the cross at the moment when Jesus gave his mother into the Apostle John's care (John 19:25-27). I think that Matthew refers to Jesus' mother here as *the mother of James and Joseph*, Jesus' brothers.

Vs. 57-61 Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, like Nicodemus. Both were followers of Jesus, and in John 19:39 it says that Nicodemus met with Joseph and brought the materials and spices for a quick burial in Joseph's expensive tomb. Again, this is Isaiah 53:9.

V. 61 I think this *other Mary* was Jesus' mother.

Vs. 62-66 The best laid plans of mice and men.

That was Friday, but Sunday's coming. What does this section mean to you in your life as a follower of Jesus in the harvest? What observations or thoughts come to mind as you read this?

Psalm 34:1-10

I have to admit that my heart really clings to the promise and assurance of this psalm. This morning, my heart is on the needing end of what David has experienced.

Vs. 1-3 This is the declaration of praise. The reasons for this bold praise are about to be given.

V. 4 This was David's situation.

Vs. 5-10 Does v. 5 remind you about something from Moses in Exodus?

V. 7 This sounds like another reference to Exodus.

Proverbs 9:7-8

For anyone who has tried to help others, the trick is to understand the difference between a wise man and a fool. There are a lot of brilliant fools, and as you see in Matthew, even a lot of religious ones. As a disciple, seeking and praying for others to nurture as disciples, what does that spark of wisdom look like that can shine through immaturity? Jesus saw it in Peter and didn't let Peter go. On the other hand, in Matthew 7:6 Jesus warned His disciples to stay out of fruitless discussions with fools. Wisdom teaches us when to speak and when to be quiet. It isn't a matter of right or wrong or courage or cowardice. It is a matter of wisdom and the Spirit.

FEBRUARY 14

Exodus 37-38

So, what do you get from this section? God builds furniture! No wonder Jesus was a carpenter. It is interesting that we have so many extremes of ideas. Obviously we worship God in spirit and in truth, and we don't need buildings or lavish surroundings, yet look at how God made the tabernacle and surrounding courtyard. The precious metals that they used weighed tons. We need to observe God, learn of Him and resist our pious opinions. That was the same trap the disciples

fell into when Mary broke the ointment to anoint Jesus' feet. They rebuked her, because in their minds, "God is for the poor and this was waste." The real rebuke came from Jesus.

Exodus 37

Vs. 1-9 The building of this furniture went from the inside out, from the Most Holy Place, out to the Holy Place, out to the courtyard. First you have the ark of the covenant, used once a year to make atonement for the sins of the nation, appealing to God for His mercy and presence in Israel, fulfilling the covenant of Abraham through His covenant with them as a nation. That was in the Most Holy Place.

Vs. 10-16 Then, on the other side of the veil, in the Holy Place, you have the table for the bread that had to be tended every Sabbath (Lev. 24:8). The twelve loaves represented Israel and God's gracious, daily provision and sustaining blessing upon them. (Any lessons for us disciples here?)

Vs. 17-24 Then you have the lampstand that had to be filled evening and morning so that it would never go out (Exodus 27:21). The lampstand was made from one solid, 75-pound piece of gold. This represented the leading and guidance that Israel was always to seek. This was the most elaborate and precious thing in the Holy Place and probably would represent His Word. (Any lessons for us disciples here?)

Vs. 25-29 Then came the *altar of incense* that was to be tended morning and evening (Ex. 30:7-8), that also was never to go out. This represented the constant prayers of the people to God. The smoke of the incense rose up the veil before God who symbolically was in the Most Holy Place on the seat of mercy. (Any lessons for us disciples here?)

Exodus 38

Vs. 1-7 Outside the tabernacle (the tent that housed the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place) was the altar of the burnt offering. This was also used twice a day, representing the constant sacrifice of substitution for the ongoing sins of the people. These sacrifices also incorporated all of the elements of God's provision for His people: meat, flour and wine. (Any lessons for us disciples here?)

V. 8 Finally, between the altar and the tabernacle was the *basin of bronze* where the priests washed before they entered the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The mirrors were highly polished bronze. They may also have been brass bowls used for carrying things or for cleaning as they served the needs of Moses and Joshua. The *tent of meeting* was the tent that Moses put up outside the camp where he met with God. Joshua lived in this tent when it wasn't in use by Moses. After this, the tent that made up the courtyard and the tabernacle, the entire complex, would be referred to as the tent of meeting.

It just hit me how God built in constant cycles of reminders, the bread, the prayers, the light, the need for cleansing from sin, morning and evening. God put the entire nation on "two-a-days," that is, symbolic sacrifices morning and evening. I suppose we don't need more ritual; but, as disciples, what do we do to keep the reality of His grace and our need in the center of our hearts, day and night? I read in the morning. I pray in the morning. Maybe I need to go to "two-a-days" too.

Vs. 9-20 This was the courtyard of the tabernacle.

Vs. 21-31 This is a total surprise to me. These were very advanced people who not only had amazing building skills, but they kept great records. Isn't it interesting that God built this into them through slavery, having to learn the skills to build Egypt?

V. 24 This would have been over 2,175 pounds of gold.

Vs. 25-26 You can figure out the weight of silver. A talent was 75 pounds. What surprises me here is that the shekels of silver came from the men who were 20 and older. This means they took a count and a census as they were leaving Egypt, and I'll bet they had this broken down by tribes and families.

All of this building took about 10 months. Tomorrow, God goes into the clothing business.

Matthew 28

What an amazing chapter in the Bible.

Vs. 1-10 The women came early because the preparation of Jesus' body had been done quickly to get Him into the tomb before the Sabbath began.

There is joy in all of this, but notice that the emphasis is to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. Jesus is risen, but instead of letting the disciples and everyone go ballistic about that, the angels and Jesus kind of go, "yeah, yeah, ok, are you done? Good, now tell them to go to Galilee." Look at vs. 7 & 10. I thought that the resurrection was the huge deal. It obviously was, but huge only when applied. We'll see what the application of the cross and the resurrection are when we look at vs. 16-20.

V. 10 Notice that Jesus calls the disciples, *my brothers*. This sounds like Romans 8:29, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

The significance of Jesus saying *brothers* is that Jesus was not only fully God, but He is fully human and was now the victorious human king who could rightfully reclaim the authority and dominion of Adam. All mankind should rejoice at this.

Vs. 11-15 When you read this you notice a few things. First, the Jews had political power to pull this off. The guards should have been killed for falling asleep. That they could pay off the guards and placate Pilate showed that they were really in charge. Second, the lie itself made no sense. The thought that the guards fell asleep was silly; and then, if they had fallen asleep, how would they know it was the disciples? The people would have seen through this lie very easily.

Vs. 16-20 The 11 finally get to Galilee. The mention of doubt was probably a reference to Thomas' previous doubts or what is mentioned in John when they met Jesus on the beach. Although He didn't look like Jesus, they knew in their hearts it was He.

What was so important about meeting there? The importance for Jesus was the application of the resurrection and the focus of all that He had now accomplished. They were to go.

Vs. 18-20 ought to be tattooed on every Christian. ***We have no other reason to be on earth.*** What powerful and beautiful verses these are. These are our orders, our mission, our good news, and our strength. These are our weapons to fight to save broken people like ourselves. And we've got the power because we've got HIM. This should cause a disciple's heart to beat faster.

Though saved by grace in His sovereign plan, and beloved despite our disobedience, I will never understand a believer who is not reaching out to the lost, making disciples, who make disciples.

Notice the order of this commission.

Make disciples: This is belief and repentance, entering into a living, growing relationship with Christ. The "lordship" aspect is present immediately upon belief in Christ, for if Christ is God, God must be worshipped by sheer definition of the word "God." To believe that Jesus is God is not "a meritorious work." He cannot be our Savior unless He is God, and if God, He should be worshiped and served.

Baptizing them: This personal devotion is linked to the action of publicly declaring our devotion to Christ. This must come before teaching. Learning without personal devotion and a mission leads to, well, look around.

Teaching them: Teaching them what? What did Jesus command the disciples? When you begin reading Mark and then Luke and then John, take note of what He tells the disciples. Most of what Jesus will command them has to do with following Him as disciples in the harvest, being light and salt. It is assumed that they will live lives worthy of their calling and worthy of Him. Living morally is a given. Following Him and acknowledging His name before men is the command. And remember, the motivation to obey is always love. (John 14:21-23)

And He is with us *always to the end of the age*. Not only is this present confidence in the work of the harvest, but Jesus is showing the finish line. The end of the age is coming. This is motivation to do the work now while there is still time. This is also our blessed hope that He will return in glory and we will see Him.

Psalm 34:11-22

Vs. 11-14 David earned the right to say these words through long years of being hunted and following the Lord in spite of opportunities he had to take short cuts, disobey and not wait on the Lord's deliverance. As we read the story of David's suffering, we'll see how David actually did vs. 13-14.

Actually, vs. 13-14 will be used to define *righteous*, which will be repeated several times in the next few verses. The word *righteous* is basically archaic outside of Christian circles. It would be good to think through what that word means. It means to live according to a standard and to be found "right" according to that standard. In the OT the basic standard was the Ten Commandments. For Christians, it is living according to our Lord, living according to what He stands for and according to His words. Righteousness isn't religious compliance. Religious righteousness means living according to the behavioral standards of rules. Being righteous in Christ means having Jesus' work applied to us so that we can stand forgiven and sinless before God. And then it means living according to the reality of who Jesus is and what His Word says is true about life.

Vs. 15-22 This is David's encouragement for those who are suffering to wait on the Lord. These are great verses God has given to strengthen our hearts. Notice that one is quoted by John when he gives his account of the crucifixion of Jesus. Can you figure out which one?

Proverbs 9:9-10

I feel like I need v. 10 tattooed on my heart. I think of what Paul said:

1 Corinthians 8:1 *Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.*

I want to know Him and be known only by HIM.

Philippians 3:10-15 *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*

Amen, and Happy Valentine's Day.

FEBRUARY 15

Today is a milestone for you. You will be finishing Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the Old Testament, and you'll begin Mark, the second gospel and the second book in the New Testament. Time to treat yourself to something at Starbucks© or some Chinese take-out!

Exodus 39-40

Exodus 39

Vs. 1-7 Now we learn that God is into fashion. "He" is referring to Bezalel, ben Uri, ben Hur of the tribe of Judah. He was the chief craftsman.

V. 6 The thing that stands out to me regarding the ephod, or bib apron that Aaron wore, is that on the shoulder pieces there were two stones, one on each shoulder. These stones had the names of the tribes of Israel on them. It signified the responsibility the priest bore before the Lord, representing the people of the promise. He bore this on his shoulders.

Vs. 8-21 Notice how much space is given to the breastpiece or pouch that hung from the shoulders or the ephod. Notice too that the breastpiece had the rows of stones, each of them bearing a name of a tribe of Israel. These were to be on Aaron's heart, as he came before the Lord. He bore their names as he served them as a responsibility and as a passion before God.

Not mentioned here is that the ephod and its breastpiece held two dice-like thingies in it, the Urim and the Thummim. These were used for determining God's will or judgment. When Aaron or any priest wore these clothes, he was serving the people to help them stand before God and seek His will.

When Gideon later makes his own ephod, it was probably in rebellion to using the corrupt priests and Levitical system. His bad. With his own ephod, Gideon could seek God's will without consulting a priest or going to the tabernacle. In sin Gideon rebelled against God's order. Gideon should have worked to reform the system God had appointed which would have brought health to Israel, as Gideon led them to submit to Him and His way. Instead, Gideon made an ephod for himself, and, thereby, led the nation into idolatry as they came to worship at his ephod.

Years later, when David is on the run, a priest, Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, fled to David in Keilah. He came down with an ephod in his hand. The importance of the ephod was what was in it, the Urim and Thummim. David made use of these on several occasions to find God's will and it saved him more than once.

What made David a real model, for us as disciples, was that during his younger years, he constantly sought the Lord. The priest was to constantly seek the Lord on behalf of the people. He was not to do what he thought, but was to follow what the Lord said and so lead the people before God. He was to bear responsibility for them with their names on his shoulders and on his heart. And the breastpiece held these two stones for helping the people know the will of God.

For us as disciples, our prayer life and our reading, our life closely following our Savior in the harvest, is the true measure of our ability to lead others into deeper discipleship. We pursue God because of our love for Him, but also to lead others accurately and truly, making disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 22-26 This robe went on top of the ephod. Significant here are the bells and the pomegranates. They made a tinkling sound when the priest was in the Holy Place tending to the lampstand and incense and replacing the bread. It reminded him that God was on the other side of the veil in the Most Holy Place listening to him. Also, the people who stood outside of the courtyard would be able to hear the priest serving them before the Lord.

Vs. 27-29 The other priests wore fine clothing, but only the high priest wore the clothes described above. They all wore the boxers described here.

Vs. 30-31 On the turban the high priest wore the crown that said, *Holy to the Lord*. This was a visual image for the priest to remember to keep his life holy before the Lord, so that he could serve the people. Ironically, we have been seeing in the NT that the high priest who commanded Jesus' death was not holy. He was an evil man.

Vs. 32-43 This is when they brought everything completed to Moses. Everything is ready for assembly. Notice the repetition in vs. 42-43. They had obeyed the Lord, and Moses blessed them.

Exodus 40

Vs. 1-8 Here is God's command to Moses, when and how to construct the tabernacle and the court. Notice the time notation in v. 1. It gives you an idea of how long this took. It was definitely a major community project. The people left Egypt a year earlier in the first month. Roughly speaking it took them three months to get to Mt. Sinai, then Moses was on the mountain 40 days and then another 40 days renewing the covenant. That would have left them about 6.5 months for all of the work.

Vs. 9-15 These are the orders for consecrating everything by anointing them. This included Aaron and his sons.

Vs. 16-33 Moses had charge of building the tabernacle and initiating the worship. In that sense it appears that Moses was actually the first priest of Israel until Aaron took over.

V. 32 It looks like Aaron and his sons were to wash before they went into the Holy Place and when they returned and went toward the altar.

V. 33 The final thing that was put up was the doorway screen, the entrance or gate to the court of the tabernacle. From this point on, the tabernacle and its court would be called the *tent of meeting* and it would be where Moses would meet with the Lord. Instead of it being outside the camp of Israel, the tabernacle will be in the exact center of the camp.

Vs. 34-38 This is God Himself consecrating the courtyard and the tabernacle. The cloud stood over the courtyard, and His glory filled the tabernacle.

Notice in vs. 36-38 that the cloud and the fire were present day and night to assure them of God's presence with them. Interestingly, Israel took this presence for granted.

As disciples following Jesus in the harvest, His presence in us is His Spirit, night and day, leading us in His Word, speaking to us and directing us as we walk each day. This is also very easy to take for granted. Just think though, the Holy Spirit of God is within us to lead us and help us. That should never be a commonplace thought, acknowledged and ignored.

Mark 1:1-28

This gospel is unique for a couple of reasons. Mark was the caffeine king of disciples. His short, quick account of the Gospel of Christ was the first Gospel, written to get the believers in Rome up to speed with some accurate information.

The second thing I love is that this Gospel depicts Jesus as the "Suffering Servant," written by John Mark, the failed servant. What a discipleship lesson in itself. Mark, the well-to-do, true-blue-Jew, city boy went with Uncle Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey and washed out in the first month. Defeated and broken, Barnabas nurtured Mark back into service, but Paul wouldn't have it. Therefore, Barnabas and Paul split. This "failed servant" became our first Gospel writer, and, when Paul was about to die, Paul tells Timothy to bring Mark into this very dangerous spot to help him.

So, notice how selective Mark is. Mark hits all the big events.

Vs. 1-8 This is John the Baptist fulfilling the OT promise that God would send His messenger, to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Vs. 9-13 This is the baptism of Jesus where He is anointed or commissioned as the Messiah, the coming King who will rule forever. Then Jesus is driven by the Spirit to confront the devil.

Vs. 14-20 Jesus began His ministry and called His disciples. Knowing the other Gospels, Jesus has been followed by the disciples for several months. This is their formal calling to follow Him. Jesus is shown to have the authority as the Son of Man to call these men.

Vs. 21-28 Jesus is shown to be superior to the scribes in His teaching, and He is shown to have authority over the unclean spirits. Now His fame begins to skyrocket...and all of this in 28 verses.

Psalm 35:1-16

Repeatedly, as David ran from King Saul, hiding in the mountains, living in caves with a small community that may have numbered more than 1200, he resisted fighting for himself against Saul. David was obeying God, yet he was still pursued, so the Spirit nudges David to cry out to God for help and for God to fight for him.

Before we judge David for the words here, remember that the Lord inspired these words. Also, it is hard for us to understand completely what was happening in this situation. God knew and motivated David to cry out like this.

Vs. 1-3 This is David's cry for God to fly into action. David knew his cause was just and that God had anointed him to be king. The injustice of what was happening, the lying and the constant danger of being pursued by Saul, must have created real problems for David.

Vs. 4-8 Notice the repetition of *let*. Tomorrow in the second half of this psalm there will be more.

Vs. 9-10 David understood that the only vindication that would set his heart to rest would have to come from the Lord.

Vs. 11-16 This lament reminds me of Job. When Job was down, those whom he had helped scorned him. Sometimes it takes the opposition of men and of friends to push us to the place of understanding that only the Lord can truly help us and lift us up.

This psalm concludes tomorrow.

Proverbs 9:11-12

V. 11 is easy to understand. I think the first part of 12 means that if you are wise, it brings benefit to your own life; but if you are a scoffer, it will be something that you add to your life that weighs you down.

FEBRUARY 16

Some congratulations are in order. If you've been keeping up, you've now read three books of the Bible. You've probably read more of The Psalms than you did last year, and you're making good headway into Proverbs. The point of all of this reading is connection with God. Like in any relationship, you learn over time, through constant contact and time together in different situations. As we seek to follow Christ in the harvest and in all the changing circumstances of our lives, we need the Word to be constantly flowing through us, to give the Spirit the ability to apply God's thoughts and wisdom to our hearts. Reading the Bible is not a onetime deal, and it is

not about learning content and remembering stories. We are seeking God and wanting to know His heart and hear His Word.

Leviticus 1-3

Before I came to Christ, my uncle suggested one time that I should read the Bible. I told him I had tried but I died in the third book. He told me to start in the Gospels. That helped. I relate that story only to say that Leviticus is where a lot of well meaning people “bite the dust” in their effort to read the Bible through. Hang in there. We’ll get through it together. If you want to make it more fun, try finding repeated words or phrases to look for; and underline, for example, *pleasing aroma to the Lord*.

Leviticus 1

Vs. 1-2 So, now that the tabernacle is set up, God will teach the people how to approach Him and to live with Him in holiness. The word "holy" when applied to God means both "totally pure and sinless" and "separated." Holiness is what God will be teaching in Leviticus. By the sacrifices, the minds and hearts of the people would be directed to the need for forgiveness before a holy God. In all of the sacrifices and other laws and rituals, they would be reminded that they were a people that God had set apart, separated, to be a witness to the nations.

Vs. 3-17 These burnt offerings had to do with the atoning for sin. This offering was to be completely devoted to the Lord; and therefore, it was completely burned up. This would look forward to Jesus' sacrifice for us for payment of sin and our forgiveness. It is also symbolic of the sacrifice seen in Romans 12:1, representing discipleship in following Jesus.

In this offering a person met the priest outside of the tabernacle courtyard. The priest examined the animal to make sure it qualified. Then the worshiper and the priest went into the courtyard to the north side of the altar. There the worshiper put his hand on the head of the animal and made a declaration of confession of sin or desire to have his sin cleansed. Then the worshiper, not the priest, killed the animal. The priest caught the blood in a bowl and sprinkled the blood on the altar. As the worshiper skinned the animal and cut the sacrifice into pieces, the priest arranged the wood on top of the grate of the altar. The priest then put the pieces on the altar.

As you read this, try to note things that seem interesting. Here are some of mine.

First, these offerings could only be males (picking on males?).

Second, the sacrifices could only be at the tabernacle. This meant if you lived far away, you had to travel, which meant devotion and commitment. There would be no more unrestrained sacrifice. This is why the tabernacle was also called the *tent of meeting*. It was here that they met together with God.

Third, it was a *pleasing aroma*...if done in sincerity for heartfelt forgiveness.

Fourth, the very poorest of people could offer turtledoves or pigeons. You know what famous couple offered this offering right? (Lk. 2:24) Also, Jesus was kind to the pigeons. (John 2:14-16)

Fifth, the entire animal was consumed in fire, meaning that nothing went to the priest for supper.

Sixth, each man had to know how to kill and prepare an animal.

Seventh, in killing the animal a man had to place his hand on its head. That made the act very personal because it showed that the price for the cleansing of sin was the death of an animal that visually (though not really) took the place of the sinner.

Leviticus 2

The *grain offerings* were also burnt offerings and often accompanied the sin offering. It was a way of acknowledging God's provision and grace.

Vs. 1-15 The priests seem to have been able to have some of this sacrifice for supper. The frankincense was added only to that portion that would be burned.

Vs. 4-10 The different ways this grain offering could be presented might suggest the different economic levels of the people who brought them.

Vs. 11-13 These offerings couldn't have yeast since they were burnt offerings, but they all had to have salt. A covenant of salt meant something like "perpetual witness." As the people expressed their thanks to God for His provision or forgiveness, there was to be an element of this declaration that was outward to all people. It is interesting to have Jesus say we are the salt of the earth. As disciples, our thankfulness for our salvation needs to be offered with salt and declared to others.

Leviticus 3

Vs. 1-17 This *peace offering* was also a burnt offering of thankfulness for fellowship with God. Often after the sin offering and the grain offering, there was this offering of communion with God. This offering was accompanied by a feast afterward with the Levites and also with the poor or anyone you wanted to invite. It was a sacrifice of joy and celebration, eaten before the Lord and shared with others.

Notice that this animal could be either *male or female*, and only certain parts of the animal were sacrificed by burning. This allowed for most of the animal to be cooked and eaten.

Vs. 3-4 I don't understand all of the detail here. It's interesting that the people couldn't eat the fat that was attached to the entrails. Why would you want to eat that anyway? I understand not eating raw blood, but they couldn't eat fat that was not on the cooked meat. Maybe among other things, God wanted them to stay healthy.

When I think of this offering I think of Jesus standing at the door knocking, wanting to eat with us. It also makes me think that this isn't a private party. As disciples we need to invite the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame (especially those who are spiritually so) to enjoy what the Lord has shared with us.

When we read what Jesus said about taking up our cross and that unless we renounce everything, we cannot be His disciples, we understand that Jesus is talking about complete sacrifice to Him.

The disciple, Paul, said it best in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Mark 1:29-2:12

Mark 1:29-45

Vs. 29-31 I always smile when I read this. I'm sure the image I have in my mind isn't how it happened; but I can see Jesus entering into the house, a little bit worn out and hungry, and He says, "Peter, do you have anything to eat?" Peter says, "Sure, but my mother-in-law is sick, so I'll have to cook, but don't worry." Jesus looks at Peter rolling up his sleeves and says, "Right. Where's your mother-in-law?"

Mark 1:32-39

Vs. 32-35 This first flurry of activity in Capernaum ends with Jesus, basically, escaping. Note that as exhausted as He was the night before, He got up early before daylight to pray and to avoid the crowds looking for Him.

Vs. 36-37 Peter and the others thought that meeting peoples' temporal needs was the mission. Why would you leave this kind of a crowd?

Vs. 38-39 Notice why Jesus said that He came. The gospel and His mission were always primary in His thinking. God didn't send Him to heal and provide food. The spiritual need of mankind was what He came to meet.

Vs. 40-45 Interestingly, in Leviticus, we are about to read the requirements for the cleansing of a leper. In all the history of Israel since they entered the land, this is the first Israelite we know of who was ever cleansed. And he disobeyed Jesus. You can imagine the historical event this would have been if the man had obeyed Jesus. Even giving testimony to Jesus has to be done according to God's will. This publicity, humanly speaking, hurt Jesus' ministry of preaching in the towns and cities He was sent to, mentioned in v. 38.

Mark 2:1-12

This is the first of the public conflicts that Jesus had with the Jewish leaders. The other Gospels tell us that the scribes and Pharisees who were there were also from Jerusalem. If you want to see how important and memorable this conflict was, read John 5. There are two things that link this passage to John 5. First, the phrase, *take up your bed and walk*, is very important. Also, Jesus refers to Himself there as *the Son of Man*.

As already noted, Jesus' use of the title, *Son of Man*, gave this conflict great intensity; because Jesus was calling Himself the Messiah and eternal king from Daniel 7.

Psalm 35:17-28

When you think of what David went through, you realize how deeply and desperately he needed the Lord. The Lord led David through those hours of fear and years of instability to equip him to write this. But there is more.

V. 17 This is what God was leading David through.

V. 18 This is what God was enabling David to do.

Vs. 19-26 Notice the use of *let*. Now notice how this contrasts to the *let* in v. 27.

Vs. 27-28 This is why the Lord led David through such a dangerous time, so that David could proclaim this to us and so that we might have the steadfastness and encouragement that he was given from God.

Proverbs 9:13-18

Well, we managed to go a few days without this warning, but here it is again. Notice that although this woman named *Folly* is figurative and the opposite of lady *Wisdom*, what is presented here still has the hint of sexual misadventure.

V. 17 The *stolen water* is in contrast to Proverbs 5:15-20.

V. 18 As the Lord describes foolishness, He links it to a man's weakness to sexual adventure. It seems inviting until God introduces *Sheol* (hell) into the fantasy. Even digitally, sexual silliness is just as deadly. I guess the Lord knew we'd need these warnings against the enticement of foolishness even in the digital age.

FEBRUARY 17

Leviticus 4-5

These chapters are a good exercise in Bible study. Look for words or phrases that repeat. These will go through both chapters. Also, look for *or if...* Notice also the order of those who had to seek forgiveness. It began with the leaders. If the leaders were sensitive and responsive to God, the people would follow their example. A disciple is not greater than his teacher.

Leviticus 4

The offerings described here have to do with sin that is unintentional. Another way to think of this is that it was a sin that was not punishable by death or expulsion from the community of faith.

Vs. 1-12 This offering was for the sin of the high priest. Notice that the animal has to be a bull, that the blood has to be presented in the Holy Place, and that the entire animal had to be burned. Nothing was to be eaten.

Vs. 13-21 This offering was for the sin of the nation, but not specifically for the Day of Atonement. This entire procedure was identical to that of the offering for the high priest.

Vs. 22-26 This offering was for a leader of the people. Notice that the animal was a male goat, the blood was sprinkled on the altar for burnt offering in the courtyard. When it says that the fat was burned on the altar, it means that the meat went to the priests. Notice that this "fat" isn't what you or I normally eat.

Vs. 27-35 This offering was for the common people, and it could be a goat or a lamb; but this time the animal was a female.

Leviticus 5

What stands out to me here is that sin not only cost people something (animals weren't cheap), but they had to put something to death. Practically speaking, today if this same practice were true, it might make people think twice about repeating bad habits and doing stupid stuff. The price of covering sin should remind us as disciples that sin isn't something we should get "used to."

Vs. 1-6 Now we have specific examples of the kinds of sins the common people might commit, for which they would need a sin offering to seek forgiveness. I don't think this list is exhaustive, but it gives guiding examples.

One thing that hits me was that this person realized their guilt. Realizing their guilt would be the ministry of the Spirit, but to really "realize" it would cost them something. The examples given here also suggest some instances of cleansing the conscience and some of cleansing the body.

V. 3 Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to offer a sacrifice for purification or cleansing after Jesus' birth. Obviously, Mary hadn't sinned.

Vs. 7-10 This offering is what Joseph and Mary gave. It showed they were poor, but not completely destitute. Again this was an offering for purification and not for sin.

Vs. 11-13 This offering is what you gave if you were very, very poor.

Vs. 14-19 This guilt offering seems to be a special variation of the offerings for sin and guilt. It appears that this had to do with a sin against God, which held back a portion of tithe or something due to the priests. The animal had to be a ram, and there had to be restitution of what was not given or what was lost. Then, on top of the restitution, you had to give another fifth (v. 16).

As I read this it seems to me that it would be burned into the minds of these people that when they sinned, even if it was unintentional, a life would be lost. And not only would an animal die, the person had to put his hand on its head and kill it himself. That's pretty heavy. I wonder, as disciples, if we truly appreciate the deep repercussions of sin. I know it's true of me that at times I take both sin and the Lord's death for granted. In Leviticus, God is making the people, and nation, appreciate the meaning of sin. He will also make them value their responsibility toward each other to be holy before the Lord.

Mark 2:13-3:6

Mark 2:13-28

Vs. 13-14 Levi (Matthew), the rich tax collector and socially rejected man, felt comfortable to accept Jesus' offer, because Jesus dared to face off against the religious right on the issue of "shunning" sinners. You cannot attract the lost with the message of the love of Christ, by not loving the lost. Distance of values does not mean you have to be distant from the person. You don't find a greater separation of values than between holy God and sinful man, but still, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

When I read this I always get the idea that Jesus had noticed Matthew paying attention to His teaching. By this time, Jesus had done many miracles in Capernaum. In fact, Matthew might have been there when the paralytic was healed. On this day as Jesus walked past the tax office, the Spirit nudged Him to invite Levi to follow Him.

Vs. 15-17 Apparently Matthew invited his friends to mingle with Jesus. Tax collectors were looked on as vile traitors, and sinners were "common" people who didn't know the law. *But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.* (John 7:49) It is interesting here that it was the religious people that Jesus had the problem with. He was there to be a physician to the lost and sinners.

Vs. 18-22 We saw this in Matthew's Gospel. Not all of John's disciples followed Jesus. These men were mourning that John had been imprisoned, and the Pharisees probably influenced them to be bitter toward Jesus. Ironically, Jesus reserves His first use of parables for these disciples, and His answer to them is very compassionate. If you look at the end of John 3, you will see John the Baptist use the illustration of a bridegroom with his own disciples. Apparently Jesus heard about that, and used the same illustration here to smooth their feelings. As Mark relates this event, he is showing Jesus' authority over the teaching of John.

Vs. 23-28 To put this in perspective, insert John 5 right before this event. This is why the Pharisees were now following Him so closely. In John 5 Jesus was in Jerusalem for the second Passover of His ministry. There, He healed a man on the Sabbath, and in the conflict that followed, Jesus called Himself, both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The way He used these titles is really interesting. It made the Pharisees hate Him because it was so clear.

Here Jesus states very clearly that as the *Son of Man*, He is Lord of the Sabbath and more important than the temple. Matthew/Mark/Luke have this event and the one that follows, together, meaning that's exactly how it happened chronologically. Since all three Gospels include this event, it means it was a very significant event.

Mark 3:1-6

Matthew mentions that it was "their" synagogue, suggesting that it was the home base of the Pharisees with whom Jesus was just in conflict. Some believe this man was put there on purpose as a trap for Jesus. Doctor Luke mentions that it was the man's "right" hand. The Pharisee's reaction is intense and insane. They never would have joined together with the Herodians. Sin is like that.

As disciples, if we are doing our job, walking closely with Christ in the harvest, this kind of opposition will be ours, and not just from the "unbelieving" community. Following Christ and making disciples in the harvest has to be our true reward and passion.

When you read what Jesus says in John 5, He says he couldn't help but heal on the Sabbath because He could see what the Father was doing and what the Father wanted Him to do. The Son always did what the Father did, even on the Sabbath. Even if the Pharisees couldn't see it, Jesus

lived to imitate His Father. It didn't matter what the crowd thought. Jesus acted in obedience for an audience of One.

Psalm 36

There are two things I've never seen here before.

Vs. 1-4 First, the description of the man in these verses is dark. What defense do you have if this sort of secret, black-ops deceitfulness is aimed at you?

Vs. 5-12 Second, notice the repetition of *your steadfast love*. This is our true hope and refuge. Only God can know all of the things aimed at us as we serve Him in this dark time of harvest. But knowing He knows is not the only comfort and strength we have. We have something better. Our hope and joy and strength is in the steadfast love of the Lord. That's got to be enough. Lord, teach me this.

Proverbs 10:1-2

One of the things that always interests me is the connection between verses, if there is one. Doesn't the connection between verses in Proverbs seem completely random sometimes? So, is v. 2 the reason for the responses in v. 1? If so, that would kind of be like saying...

A wise son, whose righteousness delivers him from death, makes his father glad;

But a foolish son, who gains things by pursuit of ungodliness, finds no lasting value in his life and brings sorrow to his mother.

Just a suggestion.

FEBRUARY 18

Leviticus 6:1-7:27

As you read through this section, look for *the Lord spoke to Moses*. Every place you find this phrase, God is introducing a new subject. Look also for *and this is the law*.

Leviticus 6

Vs. 1-7 These verses build on the previous section. In the last section the sin had to do with some breach that directly had to do with God or the worship of God in the tabernacle. There a person had withheld some tithe or obligation that hurt those who served at the tabernacle. Here, there is some breach of contract or service withheld from a neighbor. Note the recurring words, *realizes/realized his guilt*, etc.

Notice that this is not "unintentional." It involves theft or oppression. When the person's conscience gets the better of him, he voluntarily seeks to make restitution. Notice also, it is restitution to the neighbor, plus the cleansing for his own sin.

In David's sin against Uriah, I don't see restitution to his neighbor. I wonder if that is why Ahithophel hated David.

Vs. 8-13 These are notes specifically for Aaron and his sons regarding the *burnt offering* described in Leviticus 1:3. Again, the meaning of the burnt offering seems to be in showing God total commitment to wanting to be reconciled to Him. The offering was to pay all personal sin, to satisfy God and to make the person pleasing to Him. This offering was totally consumed on the altar. Leviticus 1:4 says that the burnt offering is for atonement. This was different than the sin and guilt offerings, both of which had to do with specific sins, and both of which could be eaten. Here in the burnt offering the thought seems to be the sacrifice, devotion and resolve of the person to be totally reconciled to God by offering the animal to take his place. There is an aspect of this offering that suggests the need for personal cleansing and atonement for sin. The burnt

offering, whether required or given as a free-will offering, was a ransom or substitute for the nation or person.

This burnt offering was required by God twice a day, every day. It represented the ransoming of the nation every day, symbolizing their need for daily cleansing and acceptance by God.

It is interesting that only the priests could touch or remove the ashes, and they had to wear other clothes when they took the ashes out of the tabernacle compound. Here it is mentioned that the fire on the altar had to be going all the time. Apparently, every time they camped, they had to designate a special place away from the camp of Israel where they would carry out the ashes and where they would burn parts of certain sacrifices. I would think that for this place to stay "clean," they had to guard it and keep people from digging through the ashes for meat or for salvageable parts of the animals.

Vs. 14-18 Again, these are special instructions about the *grain offering* from Leviticus 2, specifically for Aaron and his sons. Notice that when they ate this offering, it had to be in a holy area within the tabernacle compound before the Lord. Interestingly, whoever ate of this offering, or whatever touched it, became holy.

Vs. 19-23 Here is an exception to the priest eating the grain offering. If that offering was for the priest himself, the priest could not eat it.

Vs. 24-30 This is the *sin offering* for unintentional sin for a leader or person as seen in 4:22-35. These could be eaten by the priests. Notice in v. 30 it mentions that if the blood of the sin offering was brought into the *tent of meeting* (the Holy Place), as it was for the sins of a priest or for the nation, they could not eat it.

Leviticus 7

Vs. 1-10 These instructions are for Aaron and his sons regarding the *guilt offering* from Leviticus 5. What is interesting here is that the officiating priest got to keep the animal's hide.

Vs. 11-21 This is the peace or fellowship offering from Leviticus 3. It is interesting that this offering is the third presented by God in the list of offerings in chapters 1-3, but it is the last one presented here. I think it is because this offering was done totally out of gratitude to God and the desire to sit with Him and celebrate before Him. All of the other sacrifices are required. This one came out of gratefulness and the desire to share God's blessings.

Vs. 16-18 These verses give a special condition to the rule that the sacrifice had to be eaten on the same day.

Vs. 20-21 These verses state that anyone who participated in the peace or fellowship offering, while he was unclean before God, would be punished.

If you think about how we live today, in a figurative sense, we violate this too. We know that Jesus accepts sinners. We know we don't have to be perfect to live with Him. But we slowly begin to think that we can have all manner of sin and "uncleanness" in our lives and still have peace and fellowship with Him. We are so wrong when we think that. This morning I was reading where Paul told the Ephesians in Ephesians 4:17, *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*

If you look at what Paul warned Christians to reject and stop doing, especially in 1 Corinthians, you realize that Christians think they can live unclean and unholy lives and still partake of God. Not so.

Vs. 22-27 Here is some clarification regarding the eating of fat, that is, those internal fatty parts that were not connected to the meat.

Vs. 24-25 They couldn't eat the fat of any of these animals, because these animals were used for sacrifice. If they found one of these animals dead from natural causes or wild animals, they couldn't eat them; but they could use the fat and other parts.

This did mean that they could eat the "fat" of wild game, like a deer.

Under no circumstances could they eat the raw, un-drained flesh or drink blood.

All of these practices highlighted the differences between those who followed God and those who did not. These sacrifices and ceremonies also made Israel different from its neighbors. Even in the details and prohibitions God gave the people, they knew that to enjoy the closeness of God, they had to come to Him His way, in repentance, in thankfulness and in gratitude. To those who had a heart of faith, these sacrifices would be offered willingly. For those without faith, they would follow out of duty and practicality. And when it got tough, they probably stopped giving and obeying.

Mark 3:7-30

Up to this point, Mark has blazed through 12-16 months of Jesus' ministry.

There are three major things in this section.

Vs. 7-12 At this point Jesus' popularity has skyrocketed. Vast multitudes are following Him. Also, the religious leaders were already plotting His death.

Vs. 13-19 It was at this point that Jesus chose the Twelve. Luke mentions that Jesus was in prayer all night. I love the description of discipleship in v. 14. The part that really hits me is where it says, *that they might be with Him*. I think this is why a lot of discipleship doesn't work. You can't become a disciple via a large class. Jesus brought them to Him. He spent time with them. He involved them in all His ministry and they learned on the job. This slower, more personal investment doesn't fit our model of ministry by overburdened, multi-tasking leaders. But you also have to have the mission, to send them out and to have authority. Link this together with the Great Commission and you have disciples going out with authority to make disciples, who make disciples.

It is also interesting that Jesus gave some of them nicknames.

Since Mark reported more of what Jesus did than what He taught, the entire Sermon on the Mount is missing. This is where it would have been included.

Vs. 20-21 Yet all was not well. Jesus' own family thought He was losing His mind as they listened to the way their friends and neighbors talked about Him.

Vs. 22-30 This section is important, because it shows how the scribes and Pharisees began to explain away Jesus' power. They couldn't deny what He did, but they could fabricate a lie to explain His power.

V. 23 I am always impressed by this. Jesus heard what they were saying and called them to Him, saying, "Guys, come on. That makes no sense." The fact that Jesus could cast out demons with such ease showed that He Himself was the strong man and that the kingdom of God was near them.

Vs. 28-30 In order to have committed this sin, you had to have seen Jesus, seen His miracles and really believed that He was possessed by Satan and that His power was of the devil. What Jesus says here is a warning. I don't believe this sin can happen today, because we do not see Jesus doing miracles. But still, unbelief, powered by sin, is strong enough to get people to ignore Jesus and deny His ability to help them. To die in our sins, without trusting Christ as Savior, is the only unforgiveable sin.

Psalm 37:1-11

This psalm looks like the companion to Psalm 36. Notice the relationship between the evildoers and fretting. It is interesting to think that because this is inspired Scripture, these commands here are meant for us to obey. The imperatives are not suggestions, but it is only a disciple who is walking closely to the Lord who will be able to wait on the Lord and to follow these directives.

Vs. 1-2 This is the general message of the psalm. It is a summary of David's long experience of suffering and waiting on the Lord.

Vs. 3-9 Notice all the commands in this section. We would tend to say they are advice and that they seem worded in a gentle way; yet all the same, they are the Lord's commands. Notice too that waiting on the Lord stands in opposition to taking action against the one who wrongs us.

V. 8 This seems to give the sense of taking things into our own hands and not waiting on the Lord. David was tempted like this.

There are some great, great memory verses in this psalm that speak to humbly waiting on the Lord and trusting Him. What verses would you encourage others to memorize?

If I said that Jesus apparently knew this psalm well and quoted it, what verse would it be?

Vs. 10-11 Notice how these two verses fit together. The meek are not weak; they are strong because they wait on the Lord and keep their hearts and attitudes pure before Him. The meek inherit the earth because they trust in the Lord and are still there after God's judgment.

The solution in all our waiting and fretting is to delight ourselves in the Lord and wait on Him. Amen.

I think that for a disciple, working in the harvest, meditating on some of these verses is like having a quiet cup of coffee with the Lord, just soaking in His love.

Proverbs 10:3-4

Ok, let's try understanding this again by putting the verses together.

The Lord gives the righteous a diligent hand, and so, does not let him go hungry, but He thwarts the craving of the wicked by giving him a slack hand that causes poverty.

This is just a suggestion for looking for a connection between the thoughts.

FEBRUARY 19

Leviticus 7:28-9:6

Leviticus 7:28-38

The thing that stands out to me here is that God built a kind of tithe into the sacrificial system to provide for the service of the priests. Later, other tithes will be taken out to support the service of the Levites.

If the people had realized God's love and provision in contrast to their need and sin, they would have sacrificed gladly. And, they could only sacrifice if the priests made the offerings for them. The system was perfect if everyone kept their eyes on God and His love. If they put their focus anywhere else, it became a system of drudgery and complaining. Why should they have to go to Jerusalem? Why should they have to offer up their best animals? Why should they support the priests who seemed to have easy jobs with lots of help?

In Nehemiah, after he went back to Persia, the people stopped sacrificing and giving. The priests and Levites had to stop serving Israel and go back to their land to make a living. The city started going to ruin again, both physically and spiritually.

In Malachi you have the opposite. The priests allowed the people to be godless and to bring lame, blind and dying animals for sacrifice. God judges the priests because of the motive behind their tolerance. If they had stopped the people from bringing bad sacrifices, what would they have had to eat? That didn't make God happy. In 1 Samuel, Eli the priest was guilty of this too. If you wonder why he wouldn't stop his sons from desecrating the offerings, note what it says about Eli at his death. Apparently, he had quite an appetite.

I see two things here for us as disciples.

First, after we exercise responsible wisdom and seek the Lord's leading, if we can, we are to give for the ministry. Second, money or provision should never motivate our service. God doesn't ask us to work without provision, but there is a legitimate challenge to us when Jesus says, "seek ye first...and all these things will be yours as well." A lot of sin has been allowed for the sake of the financial needs of a church or ministry. Many pastors have stayed too long or been too silent, because following the Lord would have put them in an uncomfortable place. Jesus told His disciples not to be anxious, not to fear, and to live in the harvest believing that God would provide. Sometimes that sounds so strange.

Leviticus 8

The next three chapters will be devoted to appointing Aaron and his sons to be priests for Israel. For most people this is all boring detail. For us as disciples following the Lord in the harvest, I'm not saying we need to look it over with a microscope to find meaning in it, but we shouldn't just ignore it either. This is our Father and Lord and the Spirit saying something that was important to them. It is the Trinity saying something to Israel about the vital importance this should have in their lives and in the nation. Israel was to have reached their harvest field for God. These men were their leaders (disciples /shepherds) who were to have kept Israel focused on redemption and the love of God as the nation fulfilled its mission.

Vs. 1-4 Notice that all of Israel was assembled to look on this event. The tabernacle is now being called the *tent of meeting*; whereas before the tent of the meeting was a tent outside of the camp where Moses met alone with God. Now, the tabernacle is the only meeting place and it is no longer the meeting between Moses and God that is focused upon; but it is the place of meeting between God and the people.

So, as a disciple, where do you "meet" with God? Yeah, I know we now have the Spirit, but I mean, where do you meet regularly with God to read His Word and pray? I actually have a "corner of meeting." Sometimes just having the same time and same place can give you a lot of help in having a daily meeting with the Lord.

Vs. 5-9 The dressing of Aaron and his sons took place before the congregation. This was an important event.

In clothing Aaron, I'm always amazed at *the Urim and the Thummim*. To think that if the leaders or people asked the priest, he could give them any answer. I mean, they could have bet on horses and won. They could have told the people the weather or when a caravan would arrive. Seriously, this was an amazing thing that God had given them. Sadly, except for David, you don't see anyone relying much on this provision.

Vs. 10-13 After Aaron was dressed, he was anointed and consecrated for ministry. You don't have to be Einstein to see that, figuratively, we have been anointed for ministry too. At salvation, because of Jesus' sacrifice and blood, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness and anointed with His Spirit. We aren't just "left" in the harvest; we are sent into it, and there we follow our Lord and grow as we reach out and make disciples.

It is through symbols like these that we know that anointing has some link to the Spirit and to commissioning. Think of what happened just after Jesus' baptism.

Notice that Moses is the one officiating. Aaron, obviously, wasn't able to consecrate himself. Moses had already been consecrated by God.

Notice that the oil was poured on Aaron's head. A woman once asked for our church elders to pray for her and anoint her for healing, and when I did it I poured the oil. It distressed her, because she was used to an oil-moistened finger being pressed against her forehead. She asked me where I got the idea to pour the oil, and this is where it came from. BTW, she was healed, but I also really think that part of the healing came when she and her husband left the area and the grumpy group of believers they were serving.

Vs. 14-17 Here Moses is leading *Aaron and his sons* in the *sin offering* that would make them eligible to stand before the Lord. Moses used the blood of this offering to consecrate the altar. For a normal person this offering could be eaten by the priests. But when this was done for the priests, part of it was offered on the altar, and the main part was hauled outside the camp and burned, thereby showing its sinfulness. Again, symbolically, Jesus was killed not in the temple in Jerusalem, but outside the city (the camp), having become sin for us.

Vs. 18-21 Now this was the *burnt offering* for *Aaron and his sons*. In worship this was for atonement, and it was totally consumed on the altar. Besides symbolizing the need for forgiveness, the total burning symbolized that the animal was taking their place and they were devoting themselves wholly to God.

V. 21 Note that where it says it was a *food offering*, it means that it was "satisfying" to the Lord. God didn't eat it. It is saying that along with it being a *pleasing aroma*, God was satisfied with the devotion and presentation of the offering. This sense of satisfaction is seen in Jesus saying, *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work* (John 4:34). It means satisfaction, like food, but not from food.

Vs. 22-32 Normally this would have been the peace or fellowship offering, but because of the special occasion, it is the *ram of ordination*.

V. 22 Notice again that there was always a sense of identification with the offered animal and the transference of sin and guilt by the laying on of hands.

Vs. 23-24 This was part of the ordination and not a normal part of the peace offering. The blood was put on Aaron's right ear lobe, thumb and big toe. Then Moses did this to Aaron's sons. I think every discipleship kit at your local Christian bookstore should have a small vial of blood for this purpose. JUST KIDDING! The blood was to symbolize that all of Aaron's life and ministry was to help the people stand before their God. As disciples in the harvest, bearing the blood of Jesus, this has to be our mindset also. We are to be reminded by the blood we bear, that all we think and do should be directed to helping people connect with God through the grace and forgiveness in Christ. That's kind of cool to think about.

Vs. 27-28 Normally the priests would eat this portion, but they aren't fully consecrated yet, so the right thigh gets offered on the altar.

V. 29 The officiating priest was to receive the breast.

V. 30 This again was special to this occasion. Here they have these nice new clothes, and Moses sprinkles them with oil and blood. I wonder if they had OxiClean© back then.

Vs. 31-32 The point of a peace/fellowship offering was to celebrate before the Lord and share with others what He had given. This is the celebration part of the sacrifice and ordination. Remember, the goat couldn't be boiled in its mother's milk.

Vs. 33-36 This wasn't a quick ceremony. Not only did it take time to kill, skin, cut and burn the animals; but they had to live in the courtyard before the tabernacle for *seven days*. I think for us as disciples, staying consecrated to the Lord and His harvest requires us, at times, to lock ourselves in somewhere and refocus ourselves in prayer and seeking God.

V. 36 They did all that the Lord asked them to do. That might seem like a lame point, but wait until tomorrow. Regardless of the honor the Lord shows us one day, He still expects us to try to obey. He shows us grace upon grace even in our disobedience, but sometimes there is a very short fuse when we presume on His grace. It is good, as examples to other disciples, to fear the Lord, that is, to be afraid of Him in a healthy way.

Leviticus 9

Vs. 1-6 Now that *Aaron and his sons* are fully consecrated, they will begin their duties by sacrificing for themselves and for the entire congregation. This would take some days to do all of this for all of Israel, and it would resemble a feast. Notice that all of the main offerings are present here. Some people think this would have taken place before the Passover and been concluded with the Passover feast.

This was a great event. Tomorrow will be a sad day for Aaron.

Mark 3:31-4:25

Mark 3:31-35

Doesn't it seem like we just covered this in Matthew? So what application can you make from this story regarding being a disciple?

Mark 4:1-25

As a disciple making disciples, or even talking to an unbeliever over this section (which is also part of the discipling process), how would you explain the purpose of parables?

Also, how would you explain the different seeds to a new, growing disciple? If you hang around long enough, you will meet all of these in church.

Back on January 19 we had this parable told in Matthew 13 and the reading notes on that day have some additional comments.

How do vs. 21-25 complement v. 20? What is Jesus' argument here? How did Jesus define fruit? A disciple is called to testify to Jesus in the harvest. To have light and not use it is not good. We've been given light to shape our hearts and to let it shine.

Psalm 37:12-29

There are lots of good verses here. Which of these strikes a chord with you?

As you read, notice the concern of three major characters. *The wicked* are concerned about *the righteous*. The Lord is against the wicked, but for the righteous. The righteous are concerned about the Lord. Generally speaking, everything turns out right in life, and everything works according to God's plan in the end.

Vs. 12-13 This is now David addressing why the righteous should wait. God indeed sees the wicked and has a wonderful plan for them. God just doesn't always pay on Friday.

Vs. 14-15 David says that God brings the plot of the wicked against them. It is like they chop down a tree to fall on the righteous and it falls on them instead. This may not always be true on earth, but in a spiritual and eternal sense, it is always true.

Vs. 16-20 So much of what is written here has to do with knowing the Lord and the resultant faith and understanding of God and what He is doing in the world. If a person is secure in Christ, they are unshakable, like the house the wise man built in Luke 6:46-48.

Vs. 21-26 If this is one section, it is interesting that it begins and concludes with the person who trusts in the Lord being generous with his stuff, even during hard times. It makes me think of Jesus telling His disciples not to be anxious about their lives, to give freely and to lay up treasure in heaven.

Vs. 27-29 This is the summary of what David has seen and the encouragement to follow the Lord. Notice again that the righteous/meek *shall inherit the land*.

It's probably good for us to understand that these promises are the norm, but there are exceptions. Think of v. 25. Is this true, always? I remember hearing of a US city boy having his faith turned upside down by a girl from a third world country. He held to the absolute nature of the promise, but she had seen Christians oppressed and Christian children *begging for bread*. God allows for deviations from the norm. There are God-designed exceptions. Daniel became overwhelmed when he was told how God would allow His saints to suffer. In Revelation, God allows the slaughter of those who believe to reveal the hearts of men. The entire judgment of the sheep and the goats comes as a result of how people responded to the need of God's people in the Tribulation. Paul quotes the OT (Ps. 44:22), saying, *for your sake we are being killed all the day long*... The promise is true in the normal sphere of following, but God allows, for His own purposes, the exception. Following as a disciple might mean only being given a promise for a day, not a year. Our job is to follow Christ in the harvest, not to have Him guarantee our earthly security or plans.

Proverbs 10:5

Amen!

FEBRUARY 20

Leviticus 9:7-10:20

Just a note before we begin today. I've made a big deal about the *Urim and the Thummim*. Today I was reading my German Luther translation, and Luther did something none of our English translations do (or the other German ones for that matter). He actually used the meaning of the words rather than simply pronouncing them. So when you read his translation, what it says is "light and truth." Now, going to the Greek translation in the Septuagint, the words are as follows. *Urim* means "bringing to light, manifesting" and *Thummim* means "Truth." These two things were sort of like dice and were used to find answers, to manifest things, bringing them to light in order to find the truth. I don't know what that does for you, but I think it's pretty cool. And once again, I'm thankful for my Lutherbibel.

Leviticus 9:7-24

V. 7 Now that Aaron and his sons are consecrated to serve, Aaron is doing the actions, actually serving as a priest. His first step is to offer sin offerings for himself and the people.

Laura brought to my attention how all of this is prefaced by words like, *as the Lord commanded*. Find those words and underline them. Unfortunately, these words are very important, as we're about to see.

Vs. 8-11 This is the *sin offering* for Aaron. Aaron was also supposed to take the blood into the Holy Place and smear it on the horns of the altar of incense (Exodus 30:10). Here, it appears that he only does this outside on the altar of burnt offering. Notice that in this case Aaron is the worshiper and his sons are acting as priests, catching the blood. Apparently it was a little more

complicated when the high priest had to atone for his own sin. Jesus, our high priest, never had to do that.

It is also interesting to note that Aaron's first sacrifice in serving Israel involved a calf. There was also a calf involved in his first sin in serving Israel. Somewhat ironic.

Vs. 12-14 This is Aaron's *burnt offering*.

Vs. 15-17 This is the *sin offering that was for the people*. I suppose once you got this down, you could do it in your sleep. Or not. We'll see what happens in the next chapter.

Vs. 18-21 This was the *peace (fellowship) offering*. Aaron and his sons would have a part of this to eat in celebration before the Lord.

Vs. 22-24 Aaron blessed the people, but it wasn't until Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle and returned that God showed all of the people His glory. Whatever happened, it was visible to everyone. Unfortunately we'll see this fire again, twice, and it will have a different meaning.

I'm going to make a bridge here into the next section by just saying that what God commanded here was not as tricky and unstable as making nitroglycerine. The commands were only dangerous if you didn't take God seriously. Sometimes, at the beginning of a new movement, God judges harshly in order to emphasize His holiness and to underscore obedience. (In Acts, you have the story of Ananias & Sapphira.) Later, you see all kinds of deviations, and God doesn't judge immediately, but instead, lets sin build up until His judgment comes.

Leviticus 10

Vs. 1-7 The censers were to be filled with coal or fire from the altar. That would have been holy fire. Nadab and Abihu must have filled their censers from their own personal fires. It was March and it was probably cold in the wilderness, and one fire is as good as the next, right? This probably happened to them when they came into the entrance of the compound, passed the altar of burnt offering and were headed toward the tabernacle. The coals were to have come from the altar. Notice that the fire came out from the tabernacle without burning anything but these guys.

V. 3 This is Moses' explanation. Poor Aaron.

Vs. 4-5 The priests couldn't touch them because they would become unclean and unable to serve. Notice that they were carried outside the camp like the bad parts of the sin offering.

Vs. 6-7 This must have been hard. They couldn't mourn or leave the compound. They had to keep serving the people.

As disciples, it is good to remember that God doesn't play favorites, and He is not some fuzzy, forgetful grey-bearded relative. He is God. I've done electrical work, and I always fear the open breaker panel, knowing that if I stick my hand in there or even get careless, it's all over. God's power and presence would be lethal to us if not for His grace. To play fast and loose with God is wrong. He's like a zillion volts and a million amps.

Nadab and Abihu ate on the mountain with God. They saw stuff few people have ever seen. They were consecrated for seven days in the tabernacle and they saw holy fire come out of the Holy Place and consume the sacrifice. Being "cool with the old boy" didn't help them. That same fire came out now to punish their sin.

God may use us for big things, and He may reveal Himself to us in ways that are breathtaking. But we need to remember, He will not be mocked, even by those He has chosen to use and bless.

Vs. 8-11 Notice who talks to whom. This hasn't happened since God told Aaron to go out to meet Moses at the beginning of Exodus.

The fact that this topic is mentioned here could suggest that Aaron's sons had been drinking. It is unlikely that they had been drinking wine if this happened in the morning. And, where would they have gotten wine? I know some people and groups will want to make rules regarding what God says about drinking. This only means that the priests couldn't drink just before, or on, duty. I like that rule for airplane pilots too.

Vs. 10-11 are very important verses that indicate the purpose of this book and the purpose of God in teaching the people. Most of what God says in Leviticus after this will focus on this purpose. Many of these laws were only for Israel and, for this said purpose, "object" lessons. The people were to have inner radar for "clean and unclean" and for "common and holy." In a way, it was like sending your class brat or your unruly child to a fine English finishing school. You don't just learn how to use a spoon; you learn the proper way a spoon should be held and the proper way a spoon should be moved to your mouth. You don't just get good; you get "proper."

I say this only to help us, as disciples, to understand what God is doing here. Israel couldn't eat pork. A priest could only marry certain women. And the list goes on - things that only applied to them as a nation. Care obviously needs to be taken in understanding and applying these rules, in a couple of areas.

First, we should be careful as to how we apply, if at all, some of these things to ourselves or others. Some of these rules are still for our time and some, like eating pork, are not. We need to know the difference. Remember, the focus is to make these people set apart for God, knowing His holiness.

Second, since we are under grace, we need to be careful about throwing out the *thought* that God even commanded these. These object lessons tell us something about Him. The people weren't strange, because they wanted to be. They were strange, because *God* wanted them to be. *He wanted* them to stand out. He has a sense of propriety and holiness. Even in our culture, where tolerance and freedom of custom and morals seem to be the rule, there might be things that, individually, are not for us. There may be something in our lives, where God makes the point that it is not for us individually, and it doesn't matter if it's ok for everyone else and if everyone is doing it. God still desires holiness and He desires a people who have a spiritual sense about them for what is proper conduct on this dying planet. Disciples live to serve Christ in the harvest, and if God points out something that is getting in our way, we need to get rid of it, even if it's sold at Wal-Mart or Best Buy. And if we find a discipline or routine that serves to keep us on target in following Christ, we need to hold to it.

Vs. 12-20 After Aaron and his "remaining sons" finish their first act of service for the people, Moses checks on them to see that they fulfilled the rite in detail. They didn't. They were supposed to eat the sin offering. Interestingly, they didn't obey because of mourning for Nadab and Abihu, and God allowed this. I wonder, too, if there had been "one thousand percent extenuating circumstances" forbidding Nadab and Abihu from getting coals from the altar, like a flood or a tornado, if God would have allowed them to use coals from their own fires. I think so. In any case, they had "Light and Truth" as a way to find out.

Mark 4:26-5:20

Here is another lesson in Bible study and disciple-making. You have two parables and two stories. What points would you draw from each of these and pass on to those three other people who are arriving at your house for your discipleship cell meeting? Could you take them to the texts, discuss what Jesus is saying, and then conclude, "As disciples it is really important for us to understand that...."?

Mark 4:26-41

Vs. 26-29 Notice that the primary application is to the kingdom of God. The kingdom will grow in the world practically under the radar and without total understanding. There will be lots of time and patience involved in God growing His kingdom; but when it is time, the harvest (the coming of Christ) will happen quickly.

There are lots of secondary principles here that could even apply to outreach and making disciples. The principle I understand is that the real work is done by God. The farmer acts at the beginning and at the end. The disciple is faithful to work and patient in waiting.

Vs. 30-32 I guess what I'd say here is that the kingdom (and our work in it) seems very small and invisible, but is growing larger than we know. That gives a disciple hope.

Vs. 33-34 Just a tidy little summary. Again, the amount of time we spend (or don't spend) trying to understand the parables shows us why He spoke in parables. Funny, huh?

Vs. 35-41 After all of that heavy thinking, there's nothing to clear the mind and add vigor to the blood than a bracing voyage on the sea! Ahoy! O Weh!

Jesus was exhausted from teaching. His suggestion seems to be given in weariness, and they took Him *just as He was*. I guess that means He was kaput. So Jesus passes out into a deep sleep while these vintage seamen despair of life. When the text says, *that we are perishing*, in v. 38, the word translated *that* has a different function in Greek. In English you shouldn't even pronounce the *that*. It is more like a textual marker to prepare to yell the words that follow as "loudly" as possible. Do that and see if it makes a difference. These guys are crazy with fear.

After all of that teaching and all of that conflict, it was good for them to refocus on who Jesus was and what He could do. Anything good here for the disciple? Amen! And are they going to need it!

V. 41 Notice now they are filled with great fear for another reason. And there was more fear to come.

Mark 5:1-20

This story speaks for itself, and we covered this recently in Matthew. Jesus shows His disciples that He is not only the Lord of nature, but also Lord of the spiritual world.

Vs. 1-5 I always think this is funny. After what they just experienced, afraid for their lives, now afraid of Jesus (they were filled with fear realizing they were in the boat with a zillion volts and a million amps), they finally set foot on the safe, solid, secure ground. Then, they hear a cry like a wild animal and look to see a frothing-at-the-mouth, crazy guy, nakedly running in their direction. If I'm there, I'm standing *behind* Jesus.

Vs. 6-13 Notice that the demons begged Jesus not to send them out of the country. In the other Gospels, it has the idea of going to a place of punishment, the abyss. This apparently is where the angels from Genesis 6 were sent and are presently held. (Jude 1:6)

Notice too that this happened on the eastern, Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. That's why there are swine there. Note, too, that in the story of the prodigal son, he goes to a far country where they also had swine; i.e., among the Gentiles.

Vs. 14-17 Now the people are begging Jesus to leave. People don't always want God around.

Vs. 18-20 Notice that the freed man is begging to be a disciple. He wanted to be with Jesus. One of the possible reasons Jesus sent him away is that he needed to be reunited with family after his long enslavement.

Another reason was most likely that this guy was a Gentile. The offer of the Messiah was still being made to Israel, and to have had a Gentile in the ranks would have been too much for the Jews, who were already frothing at the mouth.

But I think Jesus knew this guy was ready to give testimony. After His rejection after feeding the 5000, Jesus will tour the other side, the Gentile side, of the Sea of Galilee, where He'll feed the 4000, many of whom were Gentiles and some of whom heard the testimony of this disciple. Someday we'll get to meet him.

Notice that Jesus tells him to go and *tell them how much the Lord has done for you*. That is the simplest thing to do in giving testimony. This is probably what the Lord would like us to do, too.

Psalm 37:30-40

Vs. 30-31 Notice how the "heart bone" is connected to the mouth and foot bone. This is very true and kind of funny.

Vs. 32-33 Again, this truth is best seen in the perspective of our ultimate vindication as expressed in Romans 8.

V. 34 I love this verse. Apparently so did Jesus. Notice again the mention of inheriting the land.

Vs. 35-38 While this is generally true on earth, when we look around in the Millennial Kingdom and in the time thereafter, the wicked will be elsewhere.

Vs. 39-40 Amen! A lot is said in this psalm and in all the Bible about the righteous. Righteousness means living in accord to a standard or measurement. In the case of these righteous, the measure is the heart of God, not the law. Righteousness isn't a comparison of person to person, but the attempt of those who love the Lord to be like Him.

Proverbs 10:6-7

Notice how parallel this is to the reading in Psalm 37. It must be the same Spirit writing this.

V. 6 This is very much like Psalm 37:30-33. Notice how Psalm 37:30 begins with *the mouth of the righteous*, but here it mentions *the mouth of the wicked* seeking violence against the righteous.

V. 7 Compare this to Psalm 37:36.

As disciples we need to remember why we have been left here. Our focus is on following the Lord in His harvest and sharing His message and making disciples, who make disciples. That's our job. God will take care of the wicked. That's His job.

FEBRUARY 21

Leviticus 11-12

In these following chapters it would be a good idea to keep the key verses of this section in mind as you read. It will help you understand the point of what God is doing here. These verses are very famous, and even Peter quotes them in 1 Peter 1:6. The verses I'm referring to are 11:44-45. This idea of being holy because God is holy will be repeated four more times in Leviticus and then only in 1 Peter. The rules that follow will be for ceremonial cleanness before God. The regulations will be symbols of separation (holiness) to the service of God. God is building this symbolism into very common, visible things in their lives. They would be reminded every day that they were to live differently for God, and the people around Israel would notice that these people were different. The point for Israel to remember was that they were redeemed to be a witness for the world.

Also, look for repetition of words. There are some obvious ones, like *detestable* and *unclean*. Underline or highlight these. It not only sharpens your skills in Bible study, but it keeps your mind active and makes the reading less tedious.

Leviticus 11

Vs. 1-8 These were land animals. The only animal that would affect any of us would be the pig.

Vs. 9-12 It looks to me like catfish and lobster, shrimp, and crab were out, too.

Vs. 13-23 I don't see any great culinary losses here among the winged things.

Vs. 24-28 If they touched anything that was dead, they would be ceremonially unclean. Usually taking a bath and waiting until evening made everything right.

Vs. 29-38 This would have been a reason to invest in pest control, or at least to keep a very clean house. I wonder if "water" in vs. 34 and 38 means something other than water?

Vs. 41-43 What is interesting in this part is the mention of the defiling of the person. This seems to cross the line from object lesson to some things that God definitely says should be avoided that were never intended for people to eat.

Vs. 44-47 You don't find anything said in terms of "health" considerations. A lot of people try to explain all of this saying that if they had eaten pork back then, they would have died because it was so diseased. Of course, everyone else ate it and they survived.

I wonder, as disciples, if we are so jaded by our culture, that we lose the distinction between "holy and unholy" and "clean and unclean." We don't like to look different from those around us anymore than the Israelites did. The Corinthians (who, by the way, were Jews and not Greeks) became overly engaged in their culture after they threw off Judaism for Christianity, and Paul had to go after them for their immorality and idolatry. In Romans, the message of chapters 14-15 seems to be that if God touches us and says something is not for us personally, then we need to heed what He says. We just shouldn't make it a rule for everyone else. It seems to me that we have let the pendulum swing too far to the side of liberty and we've forgotten why we're here on this planet of death. A disciple is called to the side of Christ to work with Him in the harvest. We are called apart to Him. And Israel was also called apart to be the Nation of God, a light in the world.

So, here is the great object lesson in all of this. Each time the people ate, it reminded them that they were God's special possession on the earth and that they had a mission, carrying forth the promise given to Abraham, which was an extension of the promise to Adam and Eve. Did that motivate them, or did they just gripe because they couldn't eat bacon?

Leviticus 12

Vs. 1-5 So, we know that there is nothing wrong with having kids; in fact, it is a command given both to Adam & Eve and to Noah & Co.

Most of this, I think, has to do with God making a point of how Israel is different. You'll notice that blood is mentioned. It is not that childbirth or menstruation were bad or dirty, but that blood was to be seen as precious, since the "life is in the blood." Later, we'll hear that men were strongly forbidden to have sex with their wives during menstruation. I think this is God making a point for Israel, that doesn't apply to us unless God makes it a point for you personally. God was placing something in their everyday lives that drew their attention to their special status as His people.

That a woman was *unclean* longer for a female baby than for a male baby doesn't seem to have any special reason other than that God is making a point. God doesn't value men higher than

women. In my opinion, it was because the Savior of mankind, promised to Adam and Eve, would be a male child. Interestingly, after Jesus, the law ended and so did the basis for this law.

Vs. 6-8 There are two offerings mentioned in v. 8. The *burnt offering* signified devotion to God, and the sin offering signified cleansing and forgiveness. If you want to read what happened on the day of Mary's purification, read Luke 2:22-38. I'm sure God had that day in mind when He gave Israel this symbol. Jesus, the Son of God, was actually part of the festivities.

Again, in childbirth, God is giving Israel an object lesson pointing to the need for devotion and forgiveness, and the difference between the holy and the common, the clean and unclean. Their thoughts would always be directed to God, and the eyes of the nations would look at them and say, "Whoa, dude!"

Mark 5:21-43

Since we discussed this story in Matthew, my comments will be brief.

But do you notice something "coincidental" in this reading? This is why I love The One Year Bible. Sometimes the combinations of reading seem random and disconnected, and then one day you go, "How did that work out that these Scripture portions fit together?"

Vs. 21-34 In Leviticus 12:4, a woman after childbirth (or any woman who discharged blood) was unclean and shouldn't be touched and was not to touch anyone, or anything else. This woman touched Jesus and they all knew it. I wonder if part of her fear and desire to hide was her guilt in having made Jesus unclean by touching Him.

So, does the ruler of the synagogue still want the "unclean" rabbi to touch his daughter?

Vs. 35-43 In the delay, they all discover that the girl has died. It is interesting to me that Jesus seems to be responding to these events as the Father is revealing them to Him. He didn't know about the woman and responded to the situation. Suddenly there is this unexpected turn of events. Now knowing that the father will lose hope, He emotionally rallies everyone to move forward to the glory the Father wants to reveal. As mentioned in Matthew, it seems to me that Jesus is moving very quickly to try not to draw attention to what He is about to do.

V. 41 Notice that Jesus took her (the corpse) by the hand, something no rabbi would have done. It would have made Him unclean. One observation here is that the woman had her flow of blood for twelve years and the little girl was twelve years old. That may not be important but it is interesting.

If Jesus heals you, you're clean. What an amazing truth we take into this dark harvest. His amazing treasure is in those of us who were once separated from God by our "uncleanness," who now, through His touch, have become disciples separated unto God, following our Lord in the harvest to make disciples, who make disciples. What amazing mercy and tenderness by the Son of God.

Psalm 38

Do any of these verses speak to you? I'm really feeling vs. 6-10 and vs. 21-22.

It would be interesting to know when David wrote this psalm. There are some clues in this regarding the circumstances. Apparently David had done something wrong, and at the same time he had enemies on his heels. It's enough to be in danger, but also to have the guilt of having done something that has damaged your relationship with God, well, that's really bad. If this is David's earlier days, I would guess it is when David just started running, and the result of his lying resulted in the deaths of the priests and their families at the hand of Saul. That would have brought David a lot of guilt. And then, Saul and all the leaders of Israel were after David to kill him.

Vs. 1-10 I'm amazed at the poetry and accuracy of this. This is how we feel before God when our own sin and guilt overwhelm us.

Vs. 11-12 I don't know the historical situation, but I'll bet that the way Saul and his men explained the massacre at Nod was that it was somehow David's fault or his doing.

Vs. 13-14 This sounds like brokenness.

Vs. 15-22 Notice how David alternates between asking God's forgiveness and asking for His help.

As disciples we still slip and fall. Our sin is still very powerful. Yet, it seems like the Lord is saying in this psalm that we are to use this as the model of crying out to Him and seeking forgiveness and restoration. He forgave and restored David and He is encouraging us to come to Him the same way.

Proverbs 10:8-9

Notice that v. 8 is public and v. 9 is private. The wicked man is dishonest with others and dishonest with himself. The person following the Lord listens in public and speaks with wisdom. Privately, he is humbly examining his attitudes, actions and motives.

FEBRUARY 22

Leviticus 13

Now, since I'm not a doctor, I won't be much help on this section, except, possibly, for comic relief.

It appears to me that this law for leprosy really signifies that leprosy was being used by God as a kind of object lesson. I don't think God is devoting two chapters to this because man hadn't developed a cure yet or that this disease was rampant in the society. Why didn't God give them a chapter on cancer or heart disease or VD? I think the reason leprosy is an issue is that God was using it as a way to visually show Israel what being "unclean" meant in His eyes. He was also giving them an image of what the spread of sin looked like, physically, spiritually, or socially. According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 192, there is no evidence that leprosy was a huge health danger back then, and the descriptions given could cover many diseases or simply leprosy in its very early stages. Equally important, in everything that is said in chapter 13, is the vigilance and early detection of the outbreak.

In all you read here, it seems that Israel was to be set on the lookout for this disease or any outbreak or anything out of the ordinary on man, beast, clothing or building. They were to catch it at its earliest stage. It looks like this was to create an alert society toward personal sin and toward cultural sin. The main person in this was the priest, not the doctor. You didn't need to bring suspected cases of cancer to him (although with the Urim and Thummim that wouldn't have been a bad idea), but in all suspected "outbreaks" he became the examiner. That is significant to God's purpose. As you read this, underline the repeated uses of *the priest shall pronounce him*.

We might be tempted to look at God's warning to Israel, to beware of any "outbreak," as paranoia or incitement to a witch hunt; but I think it was a kind of healthy caution that we dismiss. Even as disciples, we treat sin as a silly, three-letter "boogie man." Sin is the greatest destructive force on the planet. Paul and the Spirit say it is a spiritual force. Sin is not just "missing the mark;" it is a power, pulsing in our souls that grows and creeps and infects. Leprosy is a fantastic picture of it. Without the indwelling Spirit and the cleansing agent of the Word, we would be absolutely "leprous," and all that we touched would be unclean. We can still be that if we decide to ignore God enough. Look at the church in 1 Corinthians.

What is interesting to me, and I'll probably say it tomorrow too, that although there was a provision for being healed from leprosy, until Jesus, no Israelite was ever cleansed. Didn't the lepers come to God for healing? Maybe not. The first time Jesus gets thrown out of Nazareth, He says to the people there, *And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.* (Luke 4:27) And the whole synagogue went crazy. In the entire Old Testament, cleansing from leprosy (and the faith thereof) was only found in Naaman the Syrian, a Gentile, and then, only because he had good servants.

Vs. 1-46 This has to do with an outbreak of leprosy or some kind on a person. Notice that vs. 45-46 are a summary statement.

V. 29 I fully agree with this verse. If a woman has a disease on her beard, there is definitely something wrong.

V. 40 Whatever happened to "The verse of the day?" This custom has fallen on hard times today, whereas in days of yesteryear, many a soul has been helped by the verse of the day appearing on doors or screen savers. Years ago, I swapped out the church secretary's verse for my own (I was a seminary student then, not the pastor.) out of this chapter. I like it better in the RSV, and feel free to use this where appropriate.

Leviticus 13:40 "If a man's hair has fallen from his head, he is bald but he is clean.

Vs. 47-59 This is an outbreak of some sort on animal skins or cloth.

Again, in thinking about sin, as disciples, is it possible that the disease can spread to stuff? Can stuff be polluted by our sin and can we be polluted by stuff? I'm obviously using a very broad view of "stuff." Oddly enough in German, "stuff" (Stoffe) means cloth.

Mark 6:1-29

Mark 6:1-6

Vs. 1-6 This was Jesus' second visit to Nazareth. The first visit was at the beginning of His ministry, and now He was the most popular man in Israel. It was a gracious thing for Jesus to return, considering they tried to kill Him the first time. It mentions that His disciples were with Him now, meaning not just the Twelve, but the large group that followed Him. It was like the American Idol winner coming home.

V. 2 These questions seem to imply that they were impressed with Jesus.

V. 3 This shows what they really felt. A carpenter was a lowly blue-collar worker. To name Jesus by His mother was demeaning in that culture. Even if your father was dead, you were still referred to as his son. The people were hardened in unbelief. They knew His family; they knew Him, so, big deal. The word "offense" means "to stumble." Jesus wasn't so special, and now the religious authorities had "explained" Jesus' power.

Vs. 5-6 The fact that Jesus could not heal many doesn't mean that His power didn't work, like He could only get "one bar" of connection to God's power or that He had a slow download speed because of their dense hearts. It means that they didn't bring many sick people to Him to be healed.

Vs. 6-13 Jesus had prepared the Twelve to do this by example. This is a good discipleship principle. Show people how to do things by example, doing it with them. They had seen Jesus enter town after town for the past year, and the Father had always provided. Both Matthew and Luke say that they were not to "acquire" a staff. Apparently they were allowed to take the one they already had.

Vs. 12-13 I'm always amazed at the simple message and the power the Lord gave them. By the way, Jesus also went out preaching, but He wasn't alone. All the other disciples and the women who accompanied them were with Him. In Acts 1:20-23 it mentions two disciples, Joseph and Matthias, who had been with Jesus from the beginning just like the others. These two guys were there but not chosen to be part of the Twelve.

Vs. 14-29 Jesus' popularity was still climbing, and now that the disciples were going out and performing cures and miracles, apparently the talk increased. We covered this in Matthew, so I'll only add a couple of comments.

Vs. 14-16 These "guesses" as to Jesus' identity will be mentioned again when Jesus asks the disciples, and Peter confesses that He is the Christ. Apparently Herod had a guilty conscience.

Vs. 17-29 This is a "flashback" to what happened to result in John's death.

I don't know what lessons you get from this section, but I'm always struck that John's ministry might not have been as long as his imprisonment. It's hard to find dates, but the consensus is that John sat in prison a long time, perhaps a year.

Today, we still look at "success" as a measure of blessing. I think as disciples, faithfulness is our real goal in following Christ in the harvest. Romans 8 assures us that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. However, we have to trust that God and what He does is good even if we don't understand it. Look at Abe and Moses. They spent many years trusting God out in the wilderness. John was faithful in his testimony and service. And then he was faithful in prison, fulfilling God's plan for him.

Psalm 39

Vs. 1-3 It appears that David tried to cope with his situation by just keeping his mouth closed, but the situation caused him real questions regarding the justice and purpose in life. It is interesting that this is very much like what happened to Job. Job didn't sin with his mouth, but things did boil within him until he had to express his frustration and desire to understand God's purpose.

Vs. 4-6 How would you title this? What is David's question? It seems, like Job, that David wants to understand God's purpose.

Vs. 7-11 How many men in the Bible have we already read of who had to put their hope in the Lord and had to wait? Waiting in hope and trust is the norm, not the exception.

Vs. 12-13 It is interesting that David cries out like this with such distress and need. It is just as interesting that God brought him to the place where David had to cry out like this, to encourage us to wait on the Lord and cry out like this too.

As disciples, it is in God's plan to bring us to places like this to learn, as David did, that life is short; and when we can't understand God, it is better to be silent publicly in our waiting, and privately, to be crying out knowing that our hope is in Him alone.

Proverbs 10:10

After reading this, I really have a hard time winking at people, except to encourage them. Otherwise, it smacks of deceit and hiding. And the message about babbling seems to be that if you don't have anything to say, don't say it. Fools babble, not the wise.

FEBRUARY 23

Leviticus 14

Vs. 1-9 This is the initial public cleansing of the leper to bring him back into the community. The use of the two birds is interesting and might symbolize death and life. It is also interesting that he had to live outside of his tent for a week. That would have been very public. People could have brought over casserole dishes and come and talked with him or her.

The shaving looks like it was everything, from the head to the top of the big toe. The person would have had less hair than a newborn baby.

Vs. 10-32 This is the ceremonial cleansing to be invited back into the worship of Yahweh. Verse 21 repeats everything for the situation of a poor person, yet in both descriptions of cleansing for a leper, at least one lamb had to be offered. This is a very interesting situation in that it is like the ordination of a priest, but even more elaborate in one detail, the "commissioning to service" with oil.

V. 14 There is the same applying of blood to the right ear, right thumb and right big toe, that there was with Aaron and the priests. These two places are the only places in the Bible. So it makes me wonder about the connection. What did a priest and a cleansed leper have in common? The only thing I can come up with is that a leper was "dead" in a figurative sense, being a walking symbol of sin and separation from God. The healing and being made clean would symbolize life from the dead. In the consecration of Aaron, the meaning of the blood seemed to be that all of his life: thoughts, doing and going were to be devoted to God in ministering the blood, or leading people to God for forgiveness and cleansing. My sense is that the leper, now redeemed from death, was to be consecrated to God and was to live his life under the "direction" of that blood, giving testimony to lead others to the forgiveness and cleansing of God.

V. 17 But here the leper is anointed with oil in the same way he was anointed with blood. And then the oil was poured on his head. In a way, it looks to me like a commissioning service to live a life of testimony to the congregation. The oil represents the anointing to a task, but symbolically, oil represents the Holy Spirit. In some sense, it makes me think of the demonic guy with the legion who, having been set free, wanted to follow Jesus. In sending him home, Jesus commissioned him to be a living testimony to the power of God.

As a disciple, it seems to me that we've been lepers. We've been made alive and forgiven and cleansed by the blood. All our thoughts and doing and going should be led by that blood. And we've been anointed by the Spirit, commissioned to the harvest. We live to follow Christ and give testimony and lead others to the forgiveness and cleansing of God, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

In Mark 1:40-45, Jesus told that leper, the first Israelite leper we ever know of (besides Miriam) to be healed, to go and present himself to the priest. The priest would have had to publicly pronounce this man "clean." That would have been a great public testimony by a priest showing that Jesus had done the work of God. It would have been an amazing public event. The guy did his own thing, disobeyed, and caused problems for Jesus.

Sometimes it is best to obey God in the system, following Christ as He desires.

Vs. 33-57 Now, there is a lot in this section regarding cleansing and sacrifice and houses. I suppose the purpose is to show the people that all growing manifestations of rot and decay, spiritually, physically and culturally, are deadly and unclean. This clearly was an object lesson. When you read this section, pay attention to the beginning verses. They tell you that there must have been a purpose.

Vs. 46-47 Notice that whoever is in the house is ceremonially unclean.

Vs. 48-53 Notice the cleansing ceremony with the birds symbolizing death and life.

I never understood this stuff about leprous material or a leprous house until I lived in Texas during all the black mold stuff in 2001 and we discovered it in our house. We didn't just have black mold, but yellow and red and green. Some of it was actually very pretty stuff....cough, cough, cough.

Mark 6:30-56

Vs. 30-44 It's interesting that Jesus tries to teach the disciples the importance of getting into isolation after a draining time of ministry. It's also interesting that it doesn't work. Instead of being able to relax, they are pursued; and Jesus, moved with compassion, teaches the people. He probably did some healing as well, and the disciples probably helped organize the people into lines. The result was that this was not rest and relaxation for the disciples. It is interesting to think that the disciples got to watch Jesus respond to the Father changing His plans. Jesus was the perfect, flexible Son of God, living only to respond to what the Father was doing. I probably would have gotten mad and blown up trees and thrown mountains into the sea.

V. 35 According to John, this was in March, just before the Passover, and these crowds were probably on their way to Jerusalem. The disciples recognized the problem. It was late and would get dark quickly, and there were lots of people in the middle of nowhere. (There is actually a small city in Texas called "in the middle of nowhere," *Midlothian*, Texas, which now has a Wal-Mart and no longer lives up to its name.)

V. 37 When I think of the disciples here, it is really the same scenario as the first days of the Exodus. How is God going to feed all these people in the middle of nowhere? Imagine the disciples coming off of this spiritual victory. Now, instead of resting, they were serving even though they were tired; and then, after hours of serving and hearing Jesus teach they are very, very tired. Then Jesus says, *You give them something to eat*. What is interesting is that there is a story in the OT of God doing something like this with Elisha the prophet, so with both the manna in the wilderness and with the prophet Elisha, there was a precedent for feeding crowds.

So, what lesson do you think the disciples learned from this event? We talked about some of this in Matthew.

Vs. 45-52 Elsewhere we learn that Jesus sent the disciples away as a decoy. The people knew Jesus was still up on the mountain, and so they waited for Him in order to take Him captive and make Him king.

The disciples still haven't rested. Jesus tells them to get into the boat and they just do it, now fighting the wind.

The thing I get from all of this is that there are times God pushes us, in our following, to exhaustion, to teach us in that tiredness to exercise our faith. It is easy to follow, and it's easy to have faith, and it's easy to be joyful when you are well rested. You test the real depth of learning or training under duress, and sometimes it takes a long time to get us to that teachable moment.

So how do you explain the last part of this? They were terrified and astounded...because they did not understand about the loaves. What didn't they understand there, that led them to be terrified here?

I think it has to be some connection they missed regarding Jesus and who He was. And in that connection, something they missed with regard to the manna. God is preparing them to understand who Jesus is. Immediately after this boat ride, we have John 6:24-71. Jesus' words in John 6 tie this all together. Peter's words in John 6:68-69 show you that they finally understood about the loaves. Jesus was the bread that came down from heaven.

Vs. 53-56 It is amazing to think that many of these people who are pursuing Him will turn from Jesus when He gets to Capernaum. I guess the question is, "Do you want Him, or do you want what He can give you?" It's not the same thing.

Psalm 40:1-10

Again, this is a psalm that my heart latches onto. These are only the first ten verses, but what great verses. Laura and I have memorized these, and they are comforting and challenging. They are exactly what I think a leper was supposed to do after he was cleansed.

This psalm is "after the fact," in that David had already received the deliverance he cried out for. I like the crying out and waiting. You have to notice the frequency of these words in The Psalms and get the idea that this is what God wants us to do. We might be tempted to say, "But things aren't that bad." Maybe we don't feel it, but in reality, things are always worse than they seem, considering that our planet is on course for a bad day.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that the *new song* didn't come until after the deliverance. We don't have to feel guilty about not having the new song, if we are still waiting for the Lord. He will give it when it is time.

Vs. 4-5 This is a part of that new song.

Vs. 6-8 These verses are quoted regarding Jesus in Hebrews 10:5. The word "ear" is taken together with "body" in Hebrews 10 to mean both a body and the understanding of what to do with that body. It's interesting that we're reading so much about *sacrifice and offering* in Exodus and Leviticus, and here it says the opposite. Verses 7 and 8 are the answer, and this was probably the answer back when Leviticus was penned.

Vs. 9-10 These verses show precisely why God allows us to get into bad scrapes, so He can deliver us, and so we can give genuine, heartfelt praise and testimony to God. We're back to the cleansed leper again.

Proverbs 10:11-12

You can really see the design of these verses, *the mouth of the righteous being a fountain of life* that issues from a heart of love that covers sins. *The mouth of the wicked conceals violence*, motivated by a heart of hate that *stirs up strife*.

Do you recognize the second half of v. 12? You hear it all the time, and it's quoted in James 5:20 and in 1 Peter 4:8. Maybe the way it is used here helps us understand what it means in the NT.

FEBRUARY 24

Leviticus 15:1-16:28

This is the chapter that we've all been waiting for...not. But hey, it does make you wonder a little, why we have it in the Bible. God is the one who told Moses to tell this to the people. There is a message in all of this. One message was for the nation, having to do with their view of their need before God. These things taught them what was holy and what was common, and what was clean and what was unclean. All of their lives and disciplines would have daily reminders of how they stood before God. For us as disciples, the other message is that even though these "rules" don't apply to us, God still wants us to have a mindset that there is to be holiness in how we live before the Lord and that holiness is to be valued. There is a "cleanness" that is important that we should seek to maintain in our behavior and attitudes as we honor God. This mindset has nothing to do with "works" or earning God's love, but it has to do with having a sober attitude toward where we live, and a grateful attitude toward whom we serve.

One of the challenges today is to think of why chapter 15 comes before chapter 16 topically. I think it has to do with the fact that chapter 15 deals with very regular parts of life and ceremonial cleanness, that is, readiness to worship at the tabernacle. Chapter 16 has to do with the national Day of Atonement. If you understand the importance of chapter 16, chapter 15 is letting people know that before that day or any of the important days of worship, (the Passover, for example) they needed to plan their lives accordingly so they would be ceremonially clean and able to worship at the tabernacle. This reminds me of what God told Moses to tell the people when they were about to come before the mountain and make the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 19:15. Apparently this command didn't have anything to do with cooties.

Leviticus 15

This chapter follows a pattern: Man who is sick, man who is not sick, woman who is not sick, woman who is sick. In the case of both sick people, after they were well, they were to go to the tent and make an offering of devotion and an offering for the cleansing of sin. This is easy for them to do now, since they are living around the tabernacle, but later when they are in the land, this will mean taking a road trip (depending *when* they lived) to either Gilgal, then Shiloh, then Nod and finally Jerusalem. That would require obedience, but most importantly, gratefulness to God for their cure. I wonder if they ever obeyed this once they were in the land and the tabernacle was harder to get to? In the case of the well people, their normal bodily functions only made them "unclean." The passage of time and bathing made them clean again.

Vs. 1-12 These general rules seem to apply to anyone who has any emission. Notice that it means that if it involves intercourse, both people are unclean and the sheets have to be washed.

Vs. 13-15 This emission could have been due to disease or infection, but it is definitely sickness. One recurring thing in this section will be the seven days of cleansing followed by sacrifice. There is one suggestion I read that linked this to gonorrhea. Who knows? This meant that this person was a perpetual hazard to people who wanted to be ceremonially clean. Also, when this person was cured, they would have to travel to the tabernacle, wherever it was, and offer sacrifices for their cleansing. I wonder if they did.

As disciples, what is interesting to me is our response after we have recovered from something. We don't have to give an offering of devotion and an offering of cleansing and forgiveness. We offer up (if at all) a quick prayer, and we thank God that we can eat bratwurst again. Even though doctors and antibiotics are involved, we need to remember that only God can cure. We should be grateful. This is what Israel was learning.

Vs. 16-18 Does this surprise you? Since this involved the normal functions of life, it was cleansed by water and a person didn't need a sacrifice or a trip to Jerusalem. If it had required a trip and a sacrifice, that would have really kept the population down.

The first part has to do with a wet-dream or masturbation. I get that. Any emission of semen made a man unclean until the evening. The second part has to do with making love, being one flesh. This is something good and, being mentioned here, was obviously in the context of marriage. This is something good and commanded and invented by God. So, why the uncleanness? I think it is because of touching the semen. I think God is making a point, not because of it being "yucky," but because of it being special in some sense. As part of the reproductive process there is an aspect of the transfer of life, the transfer of sin, the fact that there is a divinely ordained miracle involved and maybe that in this miracle there is a measure of tragedy because of what is transferred along with the life.

Another thing that is interesting is that the whole reason to be ceremonially clean was to be wholly ready for God and to be able to receive His blessing. The "cleanness" was symbolic of total devotion and separation to God. There were times when God demanded that the people

were to be clean, and He gave the command in Exodus 19:15, *Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.* As already mentioned, it probably wasn't because women have cooties, it was because husband and wife were to appear before Him, "clean," devoted, fully focused on Him and separated to Him. The NT version of this is 1 Corinthians 7:5, *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

Now this is not the case with us at all, but just think of the logistical ramifications there would be in our lives if we knew we couldn't go to church if we had done something the night before. It would keep our actions in the forefront of our thinking and planning. We would have to think, "Ok if I do that after 9 p.m., it will go into the next day so I'll be disqualified. So we'll have to do that earlier so we'll be cleansed by evening.

Since the real focus is being cleansed to stand before God, you would always be thinking about the events before you and your actions. In a positive way, it would keep your connection with God always at the top of your thinking and planning. I'm glad we don't have those laws, but I would probably benefit, as a disciple, from that kind of thinking.

Vs. 19-24 I just have a few notes here.

First, the reason for the longer time of cleansing here was because of the blood. Blood has a special character in the Bible, because Leviticus 17:11 says, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood...* Also, the blood after menstruation is "dead."

Second, "menstrual impurity" doesn't really appear in the Hebrew. The word is either "menstruation" or "separation," but it seems that the word "impurity" was added to the range of meaning because of this context, that is, menstruation causing ceremonial uncleanness. This is one place where you want to go with the KJV or NKJV. There is nothing impure about the process, and impurity isn't necessary to the translation. Yucky might work, but not impurity.

In v. 24, there is the case of a husband unwittingly making love to his wife at the beginning of her period. Since he touches the blood, he too is unclean for seven days. In Leviticus 18:19, husbands will be commanded to leave their wives alone during the wife's "separation," or "menstruation."

As said before, these commands are object lessons for the nation of Israel, not for anyone else. God is weaving the regard for His holiness, and their separation to Him, into the daily fabric of all they do.

Without being legalistic or rigid, it is good for us as disciples, to have a high regard for God's holiness and our lives as being separated to Him. As we live for Christ every day, following Him in the harvest, Christ becomes woven into all we do.

Vs. 25-30 This is a sickness, and therefore the healing was followed up by sacrifice. This is the woman we just read about with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25.

Vs. 31-33 I made this its own section because of v. 31, explaining the purpose of these laws. The real focus was that the people should know they needed to be separated unto God, coming to Him with a sense of holiness and purity. God allowed exceptions; for example, in Mark 5:25, the Son of God allowed Himself to be approached and touched by an "unclean" woman.

Leviticus 16:1-28

This chapter describes the Day of Atonement in October. The priest could only enter the Most Holy Place one time a year. Just as an exercise in Bible study, go slowly through the chapter and try to list the order of events.

Vs. 1-5 Aaron and his sons were only to go beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. God says it is because of the mercy seat and His glory being in that place. What is emphasized here is that Aaron could only come in with the blood of the sacrifices and, first, as a sinner needing forgiveness and serving the people. It isn't until v. 23 that Aaron wears the high priest's clothing.

Vs. 6-10 This explains what the animals are for. That second goat is very significant in the symbolism that God is building into Israel, and it has something to do with us and our understanding of Jesus.

Vs. 11-14 This is Aaron's sacrifice for his own sins. Notice that the censer had to be filled with holy fire from the altar of sacrifice. Also it is significant that the entire place had to be smoked up. If that represents prayer, I'll bet we don't pray enough. Hebrews refers to what we're reading here, especially Hebrews 9. Jesus, as our high priest, had no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself since He was sinless.

Vs. 15-19 The main purpose of this event was the yearly covering of the sins of Israel. Before this could happen, Aaron and the tabernacle had to be cleansed. Aaron needed cleansing from his own sin, and the tabernacle needed cleansing because of the effects of being surrounded by sinful people. When all these were cleansed, then payment was made for the people.

Vs. 20-22 One of the goats, the scapegoat, had the sins of the people placed on it and was sent into the wilderness to Azazel. Azazel means removal. To get the best take on this, I'll give you a couple lines from Eaton's Bible Dictionary:

This word has given rise to many different views. Some Jewish interpreters regard it as the name of a place some 12 miles east of Jerusalem, in the wilderness. Others take it to be the name of an evil spirit, or even of Satan. But when we remember that the two goats together form a type of Christ, on whom the Lord "laid the iniquity of us all," and examine into the root meaning of this word (viz., "separation"), the interpretation of those who regard the one goat as representing the atonement made, and the other, that "for Azazel," as representing the effect of the great work of atonement (viz., the complete removal of sin), is certainly to be preferred. The one goat which was "for Jehovah" was offered as a sin-offering, by which atonement was made. But the sins must also be visibly banished, and therefore they were symbolically laid by confession on the other goat, which was then "sent away for Azazel" into the wilderness.

Vs. 23-28 After this cleansing of Aaron and the tabernacle, Aaron would put on his high priest's clothing and be ready to offer other sacrifices for the Day of Atonement. Notice that everyone that is associated with taking the offerings out, etc., is required to wash with water.

This is all pretty cool. God not only forgave, but He gave them a visual aid of removing their sins. Their sins were loaded on a scapegoat, and they watched the animal pass out of sight, taking their sins farther and farther away. That is a symbol of what Jesus did for each of us. Psalm 103:12 - *As far as the east is from the west, So far does He remove our transgressions from us.*

Hebrews 10:4 says, *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* It is referring to this event that only covered their sins for a year. By contrast, the sacrifice of Christ covers our sin forever. That forgiveness and relationship with God is something good to take into the harvest as we follow our Lord.

Mark 7:1-23

One of the things you wonder about is why Jesus was so hard with the Pharisees and scribes. I don't think we appreciate how dangerous it is to substitute our traditions for God's Word. I don't think we fully grasp how easy it is to use the Word to justify anything, including our lack of mission or fruit. And what gets lost in all of our tweaking of the Bible to conform to our lifestyle

is our understanding of God and living in authentic relationship with Him. Jesus was God and could understand their hearts and the ramifications of what they were doing and teaching.

Vs. 1-5 Isn't it interesting that they went after Jesus on the topic of being ceremonially clean. These traditions of the elders were not in the Bible. They were rules, however, that became law for every Jew.

Vs. 6-13 Notice how Jesus shows them that rather than honoring God, they are fulfilling a prophetic judgment that God gave through Isaiah.

Honoring father and mother had a very strong financial component. Honoring meant caring for them as their age increased and their health declined. A son was to shape his life accordingly, to prepare for this coming event. *Corban* was a trick that honored neither God nor family. I wonder if the opposite of *Corban* was "Nabroc," giving everything meant for God, to your parents. ☺

Vs. 14-23 One note here is that after Jesus taught this in public, humiliating the Pharisees, it intensified their hatred for Him and He had to leave Judea for a while.

So what is the real point in all Jesus says about cleansing? It's interesting that we're talking about cleansing here and in Leviticus. What really defiles us is within, that is, sin. Jesus makes this clear. So, what really cleanses us? That is what the Pharisees and scribes wouldn't and couldn't find, because the answer wasn't a "what," but a "who." Who cleanses us is He who forgives us and then sends His Holy Spirit to live in us. Once we know Him, it is only by living in that close, daily connection in the Word and following the Spirit, that we can make sure that what comes out of us is honoring to our Father.

This is why for us as disciples, like the priest, the first order of business is to make sure we are close to Him, in love with Him, in His Word. It affects how we follow Him in the harvest, making disciples. This is why it is so important for us to be reaching out and making disciples, because without Christ, no one has a chance to be forgiven and to have the power of sin broken in their lives.

Psalm 40:11-17

V. 11 After that great declaration of yesterday, David states his confidence in the Lord and in His *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*. It looked like David's trials were over but they weren't. It is interesting to me that God gave David many small deliverances in all the years he ran from Saul, but He made David learn slowly, waiting for the day when all would be at peace. That is so much like how God works with us. He teaches us to depend on Him as we follow in the harvest, not making our lives easy, but showing us over and over that He is faithful and that He loves us. I think of Paul in this regard. God didn't heal Paul, but made His grace sufficient for all of Paul's needs. Paul said that he gloried in his weakness because when he was weak, he was strong - probably living on his knees before God like David was.

Vs. 12-15 David was harassed and being pursued.

Vs. 16-17 My heart clings to these verses, realizing that in order for me to say these as David did, I need to walk through those same valleys with God. That's how David and Paul learned. That's how disciples in the harvest learn, and the reward of living closely with our Lord is worth it.

Proverbs 10:13-14

Try putting the parallel parts together. The reason these are in couplets is because of the parallel ideas that are being woven together. To understand them better or see them clearer for a devotional or short lesson, sometimes rearranging them helps focus on the real comparison or contrast being made. Just a suggestion:

On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

The wise lay up knowledge (to guide them?), but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense (to guide him?).

FEBRUARY 25

Leviticus 16:29-18:30

As you read this, remember one thing. No one was forced to live in Israel. Even the Israelites who didn't want to live as God's people could have just packed up and gone back to Egypt. Once they were in the land, no one kept them from moving to one of the surrounding countries. But, if you wanted to be called one of God's people and claim the promise given to Abraham, you entered into this covenant of blessing. So keep in mind that in reality, individuals or families could have defected. But if you wanted to belong to God, it is only rational to understand that you had to belong to Him His way.

The issues, of course, are really life or death in their consequences. God's way is the only way. Our sin tells us something different and that is irrational. To think that gravity should be suspended because we don't agree is crazy. These people were saved by their faith in the promise for a savior, now expressed in the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. I was reading this morning, and it hit me that in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is in Hades, but Lazarus is in "Abraham's bosom." Just as Hades is a place, Abraham's bosom is a place and not Abraham's lap. Abraham's bosom is the designation for the dwelling place for all those who were saved before Christ. It was called Abraham's bosom, because their faith was in God who promised a savior, and that savior would come through Abraham and the nation that would spring from him. That is why the place isn't called "Moses' bosom," or the "Law's bosom."

Leviticus 16:29-34

Israel's first month would have been March. It is notable that this is the only Sabbath in Israel's year where the people had to fast during the Sabbath. The fasting or "affliction" would have been in preparation for the receiving of forgiveness before the Lord. Those with a heart of faith would have found great meaning in this, but those without faith would have just seen this as a religious ceremony.

Can you understand that this event and the Passover were to be two of the main events of their year? All of the males in Israel were supposed to be on hand for both of these events. Note that John 8 & 9 take place during this Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths which followed.

Just think of all the reminders God built into the year and culture of the Jews. But what were they reminders of? As disciples, we have even more reminders and things to keep us focused. The greatest of these reminders is our commission to follow our Lord into the harvest. Can you understand what the harvest is supposed to vividly remind us of?

Leviticus 17

As you read this chapter, notice the recurring phrases, *you shall say to them*, and *any one of the house of Israel*. These will help you see where a new directive begins.

Vs. 1-7 This was an educational commandment that seems to be given for the time they were living in *the camp*. The people had lots of livestock. We think of them only having manna to eat and that was their main dish. But they did bring animals with them. God provided rotisserie quail on occasion, and I'm sure they were able to buy from passing merchant caravans. Since they were all tented around the tabernacle, God said that if they slaughtered an animal, even for food,

they had to bring it to the tabernacle and offer it as a fellowship offering. This would have served many purposes. The people would have gotten used to offering to the Lord. It would have been shared with the priests. It would have been shared with the poor and with their families.

V. 7 And it would have gotten them out of the bad Egyptian habit of making pagan sacrifices out in their fields.

Vs. 8-9 This was the design of what God was doing during those years. Of all the existing religions of the world, the Jews were the only ones who could offer on only one altar. Why do you think that was? What was it meant to create?

Vs. 10-16 We've talked about the theme of this section. God makes a big point about blood. Verses 10-12 are the clearest explanation of the importance of blood. One interesting thought here is regarding God giving blood so as to make atonement. I wonder if, as God created life, blood was created as a symbol for what would eventually be necessary in forgiveness. When we have immortal spiritual bodies, I doubt that blood will be necessary for life. It makes you think. Since this reminder about not drinking blood is mentioned here, it might also be that the drinking of blood was associated with pagan religion. In any case, blood was to be seen as precious.

Vs. 13-14 This had to do with wild animals that could be eaten. Here also, they could not drink the blood. The blood had to be drained and poured out. Being cut off could either mean being sent out of the covenant community or it meant being punished by death. I think, more often than not, it meant death. Again, if you didn't like God's rules, all you had to do was move, thereby removing yourself from God's covenant people.

Vs. 15-16 Apparently it wasn't against the law to eat road kill, but it did make you ceremonially unclean.

Leviticus 18

Vs. 1-5 After reading vs. 1-5, it is probably a good idea to read 18:24-30. God was not speaking theoretically here. Notice what He says of Egypt in v. 3. Note that God told the people what to expect. Thirty-eight years from this point, Israel will reestablish their commitment to the covenant just before they go into the land. No one had to say, "I do."

God was not only giving them regulations, He was keeping them from the excesses that already existed in the world around them.

Just as a note of trivia, Paul quotes v. 5 in Romans 10:5. Paul knew Leviticus.

Vs. 6-18 As you go through the list, you see that all of this had to do with sexual intercourse. *Uncover nakedness* was a figure of speech having to do with violating someone sexually. Some of what is forbidden here is incest and child abuse. This means that what is forbidden here was normal in Canaan.

Notice that both Abraham (v. 11) and Jacob (v. 18) would now be out-of-bounds.

V. 19 This is specifically dealing with a sense of respect that God wanted to instill in Israel.

V. 20 This is the seventh commandment. Not only would you have been unclean, but you would have committed a capital offense.

V. 21 So why do you have the mention of Molech in this verse? I don't think that God is now talking about religion, but He is talking about the outcome of uncontrolled sexuality, babies. Since the beginning of man's lust for sexual freedom, unwanted pregnancies have been a problem. Molech was a pagan society's version of abortion. Because of the very loose sexual behavior back then, sexual intercourse was a part of pagan worship (Baal, for example), and there were a lot of unwanted kids. Figuratively speaking, in this society of perverted morality, where you had the temple of Baal on one corner, you also had a temple to Molech on the other.

In Molech worship you offered the baby in sacrifice, throwing it into the "mouth of Molech," which actually was a flaming pit with a mouth-like opening. Even Solomon did this at the end of his life. They didn't have abortion back then, but they did have unwanted babies because of Baal worship, so they needed Molech. "He is also called Molech (Lev. 18:21, 20:2-5), Milcom (1 Kings 11:5, 33), and Malcham (Zeph. 1:5, KJV). This god became Chemosh among the Moabites." (from [Eaton Bible Dictionary](#))

The issue here is not pagan worship. God is saying that Molech wasn't the answer to unwanted babies. Following God's rules was the answer.

Vs. 22-23 Notice that homosexuality is forbidden, as is having sex with animals.

Vs. 24-30 These laws are more than ceremonial laws for Israel. There is a universality to all of them, except maybe v. 19. That God allowed certain things in different cultures (for example, Abe's marriage to Sarah), at different periods of time, does not mean He approved them. These laws tell you what He approves of. The fact that God adds words like perversion and abomination shows you that these are not "object lessons" for Israel, but real social and moral laws.

Notice how often God mentions that the nations who dwell in Canaan were doing these things.

Mark 7:24-8:10

Mark 7:24-37

So why is this story here? It has a lot to do with where Jesus is, where He is healing, and what the response is. Jesus has been unofficially rejected by Israel. He knows that He will be rejected and that the gospel will go to the Gentiles. Jesus is now introducing His disciples to working with Gentiles. This wasn't going to be easy. They were true-blue Jews. When we get to the book of Acts, we'll see that God went to great lengths to help the apostles go beyond their deep-seated prejudice against the Gentiles.

This wasn't the first time that Jesus had healed Gentiles. It is mentioned that great multitudes from Tyre and Sidon came into Galilee and Judea to be healed. But now, Jesus was in Gentile territory.

Vs. 24-30 Notice that Jesus was trying to stay out of sight. Again, He is showing the disciples how to be flexible when the Father changes your plans. We have talked about this story in Matthew. Since the woman addressed Jesus in Matthew 15:22 as the Son of David, Jesus knew she had faith. The real lesson and even His treatment of her was to show her faith to the Twelve. The Gentiles could have great faith in their Lord.

Vs. 31-37 Again, this story is important because of where Jesus is. This is the area that was prepared by that other disciple, who was not only clothed and in his right mind, but was glorifying God all over the place.

If this man was a Gentile, what the apostles were seeing was symbolic of what would happen later in the book of Acts. The Gentiles would not only hear, but would proclaim the gospel.

Mark 8:1-10

Jesus didn't have to feed large crowds twice to prove He could do it. And the gospel writers didn't have to mention Him feeding two large crowds. The difference, again, is where this happened. Most of the people in all of these stories were Gentiles.

The Gentiles are coming to Jesus. Jesus is still making His offer to the Jews, but it is already obvious that He is welcoming all nations to salvation. I think it is so interesting that Jesus saves us to be like Him. And working in the harvest, getting our hands dirty, reaching the lost and making disciples is so like Him.

Psalm 41

It's hard to know when David wrote this. This psalm has the feel of when David was running from his own son Absalom, and some of David's trusted friends turn on him.

Vs. 1-3 One hallmark of David's faith was his protection of and help to the poor. During the years he ran from Saul, David was still protecting Israel's towns and bringing them money and livestock. I suppose in this situation, David was the poor man that was being treated wrongly. In fact, it looks like David may have been sick.

Vs. 4-9 If this was written as David is running from Absalom, the sin mentioned is his taking of Bathsheba and killing of her husband Uriah.

Vs. 6-8 This seems to show that David was sick, and everyone was hoping God would take David through this illness.

V. 9 This could be referring to Ahithophel, David's chief counselor. This verse is an allusion to Jesus' betrayal.

Vs. 10-13 This is David's confidence in God's love for him.

Proverbs 10:15-16

Seems like a dark proverb, unless the man is rich because of working in righteousness, and the poor man is in poverty because of pursuing gain from doing wrong.

FEBRUARY 26

Leviticus 19:1-20:21

The nice thing about a section like this is that it seems so random, that you are constantly amazed at the next thing. Don't break your head always trying to find a connection; but the exercise will be good for you, and you might be surprised at what you find. These two chapters seem to aim at the Ten Commandments with tangent, connecting laws brought in.

Underline all the recurring mentions of *I am the Lord*. There might be some other things that stand out to you too, like the word *holy*.

Leviticus 19

Vs. 1-4 These laws, these words, are the heart of what God is saying. The emphasis is on the people being holy, which is separated to God. The issue isn't "cleanness" as much as it is full trust and full devotion in a loving God.

Vs. 5-8 These verses are a case in point of trusting and honoring God. The peace offering was to be eaten within two days. It was to be enjoyed, and the time was to be given to God in enjoying Him and this food. If you were too busy, or if you thought to keep some food for later, you were in trouble. A person was to give full attention and appetite and joy to this. This is where the cares of this world, or saving something for a rainy day, were in contrast to simply being fully there for God.

Vs. 9-18 All of these laws have to do with neighbor to neighbor relationships, again, mirroring some aspect of the last six commandments. You'll find the famous verse in this passage that actually fulfills the law, according to Jesus and Paul. Notice what care they were to have in their relationships, reasoning frankly with one another, never bearing a grudge and never taking vengeance. They were commanded to love one another. Boy, did that get lost.

Vs. 19-37 Enjoy the randomness of this section. How many things do you find that surprise you? Most of these laws were for the nation of Israel and those who dwelt in Israel. Some of these laws seem to have a sense of being important for all people and times.

V. 19 I would say this was an object lesson that Israel shouldn't mix with the laws and religions of the Gentiles. There were daily reminders of separateness, i.e., holiness.

Vs. 20-22 Premarital sex was against the law. The man is punished and had to seek forgiveness at the tabernacle. The animal for the sacrifice cost him something.

As in many of the individual laws, there is a precedent set that could be used in other cases. Here, notice that the woman was not guilty because she was a slave. Apparently she would also not have been guilty even if she had been married if she was still a slave, although the owner would have been guilty of adultery and been guilty of a capital crime. I make this comment here because I think that a king's relationship to any female subject would have been similar. It is interesting on that note that Bathsheba is never judged by God to be guilty of adultery.

Vs. 23-25 They were to remember that everything was a gift from God and was to be devoted to Him. This waiting would require patience and a spiritual perspective - another object lesson.

Vs. 26-28 This was most likely copying the customs of other nations. It would be tempting to say that these were "religious" customs, but most customs in those days had some religious ties. God isn't saying don't do it for religious purposes. He just says, "don't do it." They were to be separated unto Him in daily living and custom.

Vs. 29-30 I understand that God was against prostitution. Here He says it will bring the nation down. If so, we're in trouble. Notice that this is linked to the Sabbath, the day on which no work for living was done, in order to rest and enjoy the provision of God. Daughters were prostituted for money. It was a way that a family could care for its needs. I think that is the connection. It is a contrast to the provision of God and trusting Him to care for them. Since God's sanctuary was in the land, to pollute the land meant to pollute the things of God. Remember, on the Day of Atonement, the second sacrifice was to cleanse the tabernacle from the sins of the people.

V. 31 The idea was to seek God in all things.

V. 32 The idea was to revere the aged and wise and to seek wisdom.

Vs. 33-34 Notice that since they had been oppressed and strangers in a foreign country, they were not just to be courteous; they were to love foreigners among them.

Vs. 35-37 They were to be fair in all things with one another out of honor and love for God.

Leviticus 20:1-21

Vs. 1-5 Notice here that the people were to execute judgment. If they didn't, it would reveal their hearts and God's punishment would be sent against them. Tolerating sin is everyone's problem. Notice too, that God's name and sanctuary would be unclean and profaned. To allow sin would push God out and make the people unable to find forgiveness. This would be developing the same cultural sickness that existed in Canaan.

In this connection, Solomon followed these gods at the end of his life, bringing this poison into the life of Israel. (1 Kings 11:4-8)

Vs. 6-9 Notice here that the contrast is between seeking spiritual answers in the occult or living by God's statutes. Again, a consecrated people are separated and holy unto God. They keep God's Word and God nurtures and strengthens them. Because of their relationship to God, their relationships among themselves, seen in the honoring of their parents, show God's love.

Vs. 10-21 It seems to me that there is a connection between idolatry and sexual perversion. The obvious connection is that both involve rejecting God as the creator of creation and man. The less obvious connection is that both have to do with a lack of faithfulness to God driven by our desires. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul says, *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor*

adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. Notice how Paul begins with immorality and goes on to idolatry and the sexual perversion. You see this same pattern in Romans 1:18. People gave up God for images and then polluted the relationship between man and wife and went on to perversion.

V. 11 In the cases where both persons die, it must mean that it was a willing act by both parties. In Genesis 35:22 only Reuben is seen as the guilty party. Bilhah was apparently innocent and Reuben forced himself on her to show what he thought about the way his mother had been treated. What Reuben did was punishable by death.

V. 17 Note that this forbids the relationship between Abe and Sarah.

V. 21 This is why John the Baptist could accuse Herod of breaking the law by marrying his brother's wife.

Notice that God calls all of the things in this section, perversion and the result of depraved sexual desire. Some of these are not punishable by death, but they result in God's strong disapproval. A person who loved God would respect these and control their passion. Here too, God was building object lessons into the culture to remind the people what it meant to be wholly separated and devoted to the Lord who loved them.

For us as disciples, in our personal habits, it is always better to err on the side of honoring God. That is hard in our world where some believers are as "free" as everyone else. But it is before our Lord that we live, and our desire should be to be wholly separated and devoted to Him. Our mission on earth is not to be happy and experience pleasure, but to follow Christ into the harvest as the storm is approaching. Now is the time to live for Him, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Mark 8:11-38

Vs. 11-13 As Jesus was concluding His tour through the Gentile parts of northern Israel, having just fed the 4000, He crossed the Sea of Galilee to the Jewish side. There He was immediately confronted by the Pharisees and unbelief. The irony of asking for a sign is that the sign was to verify that Jesus was sent from God. Regardless of the sign Jesus would have performed, the leaders had already set their hearts to refuse to believe that Jesus was the Son sent from the Father. Later in John 9, unannounced, Jesus does give them a sign that creates a huge stir, but they had already decided to reject Jesus. No sign could help them.

Vs. 14-21 The disciples should have been puzzled or in thought regarding the cause of the Pharisees' unbelief. Instead they were thoughtless, still not examining life and men through a spiritual lens. When Jesus says something about yeast, they all freak out and think about the carelessness of having no bread and now being in need. So, why does Jesus remind them of the feedings and the baskets left over? They should have been so completely secure in God's care as to devote their entire hearts toward spiritual understanding and following Jesus. Instead, they were counting pennies. They were absorbed by practical matters instead of being focused on the issues. The cares of this world were choking them. As disciples, we need to be secure enough in God's care, to still see the spiritual matters that move around us.

Elsewhere Jesus says that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. The hypocrisy here was that they had already made up their minds but tried to look correct, like they were really seekers of God. This false kind of "seeking" and religion, if imitated, would make it hard for people to come to Christ and to know the truth. It is because of this kind of religious hypocrisy that Jesus will say later that people enter the kingdom violently, having to fight their way through that kind of dishonesty to finally see things clearly and come to faith in Jesus.

One interesting note here is that even though the disciples were struggling with a lack of faith, Jesus was not impatient with it. The next thing we will see is Jesus leading them deeper into their relationship with Him as disciples. We shouldn't give up either if the people we are leading seem to stumble. The life of following in faith is not easy.

Vs. 22-26 After this interesting discussion at sea, the boat landed directly north at the inlet of the Jordan into the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was the city that Phillip, Peter and Andrew were originally from, and so, a very Jewish city, but it still had a Gentile presence. I think this healing was an object lesson to the disciples and their lack of understanding and spiritual vision.

Jesus didn't need the spit to heal this man, but notice that as Jesus lays His hands on the man the second time, it says the man "opened his eyes." Those words actually mean he looked intently, possibly at Jesus' face. I think as the disciples saw this man staring intently, they saw the look of satisfaction grow on his face showing that his vision was fully restored and that he could now see clearly. The disciples were like this man. Spiritually speaking, they saw everything as trees walking. They needed to look intently into the face of Jesus.

This makes me think of how often God takes the long approach with us to do something that should have been very easy. The growth of our faith and our dependence on Him is more important to Him than giving us a quick victory.

It's interesting that Jesus told the man not to enter the village from which He had led him. Jesus was more interested in people understanding who He was than having His fame spread for the things He could do.

Vs. 27-30 Jesus and the disciples walked about 30 miles north to Caesarea Philippi. That would have given the disciples some privacy and time to process what had just happened in all of their Gentile travels.

There must have been a crowd there. It says that as Jesus was praying alone the disciples were with Him. That probably meant that this time, Jesus couldn't get away very far because of the people. When Jesus finished praying, He asked them the question that was on everyone's hearts. Who was He? Once again, Peter spontaneously said what was on his heart. Peter didn't understand a lot, but he knew this for sure.

V. 30 One of the reasons for forbidding them to tell anyone would be demonstrated in the next verses. They had a totally false understanding of the mission of the Messiah. What could they share other than ignorance?

Vs. 31-33 Now that they confessed Him as the Christ, Jesus told them what the Christ would do. Peter spontaneously puts his foot deeply in his mouth. I don't think Satan put these words in Peter's mouth. Peter was simply being a satan (adversary). Notice that he was focusing on the things of men.

Vs. 34-38 This is the Discipleship Manifesto. Notice that a crowd was there.

In order to be a disciple and set our hearts on the things of God, we must deny ourselves and take up the cross. That is one thing. It is the willingness to give all.

Vs. 35-37 This spells out the real issues in denying ourselves and taking up our own cross. It is giving ourselves fully as opposed to holding back.

What is interesting to me in Mark's Gospel is v. 38. This definitely means that Jesus expects His disciples to live a "telling" life. Tradition says that Mark spent a lot of time with Peter and that Peter's memory was the basis for these facts. That might explain why Mark has v. 38. Mark 9:1 is connected to this verse to complete it.

Psalm 42

When you read this, you might think that it was written by David, but it is written by the sons of Korah. Whatever the background of the writer, you can feel that he had known hard times. The psalms, or songs, of the sons of Korah, will have some other big hits, but this psalm is the best known.

Vs. 1-2 This is the key to why the Lord takes us through hard times. He doesn't just want us to wait for Him; He wants us to long for Him.

V. 3 It is interesting to think that the Lord allowed him to remain in this situation to develop that longing.

V. 4 This is what both the psalmist and the Spirit are recommending to us. We are to encourage ourselves and make ourselves strong in our remembrance of God's love and blessing.

V. 5 It is interesting to find *soul* here with all Jesus just said about our souls. God never changes, so we are to hope in Him. Our emotions change, but God remains the same.

Vs. 6-8 You can almost visualize this man standing in the middle of a storm. During the day he is focused on God's *steadfast love*; and at night he is singing songs that remind him of God, songs which naturally lead him into prayer.

Vs. 9-10 Yet there are still the present, persistent fears and threats.

V. 11 But God is telling us that those things will pass. We need to wait in courage on the Lord.

I don't know what the Lord took this man through, but aren't we happy He did? This range of emotion and need is what everyone goes through, and the psalmist gives us hope and directs us to hope in, and wait on, the Lord.

It's interesting to be thankful that the Lord made this psalmist go through this despair, so that we benefit from the expression of his faith and hope in God. As disciples, God does the same with us; or should I say, to us, so that we can comfort others with the same hope and encouragement that helped us.

I remember receiving a call from one of my daughters who is in Germany serving with OM. When she began to tell me about some recent discouragement, almost involuntarily, I began to comfort her with things the Lord did, and has done in my life. The neat part is that He is the comfort. In some respect, what we share and suggest is about how we found Him while we were in the mess, how we learned something about Him that brought our hearts to a place of insight and peace and rest. The simple answer is, "Trust in the Lord," but each of us shares with others how God has led us through the maze of our fear and discouragement or anger, to find Him again.

Proverbs 10:17

For a disciple making disciples, this is vital truth. Often in our arrogance, as we teach, we pass on our "attitude" rather than the love of Christ. Read Luke 6:37-42. We actually can lead people astray teaching them about the Lord if we are log-ridden disciples. This is written as a warning to disciples making disciples. The disciple maker needs to be the guy from the first part of this Proverb, not from the second part.

FEBRUARY 27

Here are a couple of notes before we begin today.

First, there is wonderfulness to reading a one-year Bible. If you've been following from the beginning of the year, you have been building a great routine these two months. When I started

reading like this, I had always thought that I was pretty good about having my quiet times. As a pastor, I never have my QT as part of my workday and I thought I was pretty consistent. Then I began with my German one-year Bible, and I would sit down thinking I had missed, maybe a couple days, and would find that I was behind *a week*. I mark my pages each day so there was no mistake. I'd develop strategies to get caught up, slowly inching my way up to the current date, swearing (in a devout manner) that I wouldn't let that happen again. But it did. So I really concentrated on the time of the day and getting set up in the same spot, coffee prepared and ready to turn on. This was great for me. Now, since 1995, I seldom, if ever, miss two days in a row, even on the road. As a result, my relationship with the Lord has never been stronger, even through very rough times.

Second, there is the joy of making your own observations and what this brings into a discipleship group. So, Laura comes into my office this morning with a smile. She found something in yesterday's reading. Now, to be fair, sometimes I don't mention as much as I could, but instead I'll make mention to look for something, repetitions of words, etc. I was not only happy for her, but it felt good to see something I had never noticed before in the text. Yesterday (and today) in the OT reading, I never caught the repetition of, *I am the Lord*, or *I am the Lord your God*. How cool. Then we talked about the application of that phrase for us as disciples. As our Lord, He lovingly guides, directs and protects us. As our God, He sustains us, making our lives worth living on earth, and preparing us to live with Him in the future. In a group, everyone would be adding to the encouragement and strengthening that this phrase gives to us. Very cool.

So, when you discuss the reading in The One Year Bible with others in a group, there is a joy in seeing people find stuff and really getting into it. This is a very natural way to help, strengthen, and encourage one another as we follow Christ in the harvest, reaching out and making disciples, who make disciples.

Leviticus 20:22-22:16

Notice the repetition in this section. It isn't just *I am the Lord*, but look at all the mentions of *holy*. If I were to ask you at the end of Leviticus, what the point of the book was, these words would give you a very good idea.

Leviticus 20:22-27

As you read and come to a section like this, which comes at the end of a chapter, you have to ask yourself what the purpose of this block is. It appears to be a summary. Summaries often contain purpose statements.

Notice again the mention of vomit. This is what would happen to the people in the land they were taking. Imagine, all the idolatry and sexual perversion we've just read about were considered normal culture and everyday life in the land of Canaan. This is a warning here, but by the time we get to Jeremiah, it will be reality. Israel will be "vomited" out of the land into exile.

So, why v. 27? How does it fit? I'd suggest that the people were to be constantly coming to the Lord with questions. Mediums and necromancers were a common way for people to get answers. We'll see King Saul go to a medium in 1 Samuel 28:7. It is interesting to note that Saul destroyed a city of priests. Answers to all the people's questions could be found with the priest who carried the Urim and Thummim. Instead, the people would be tempted to find answers closer to home. After all, Jerusalem was a long way away. Israel only had one God, one place to worship and one altar. Jerusalem was far away, but they had a God who would lead them and answer them. If the answer didn't come in prayer, it could be found in Jerusalem with the priest of God.

Leviticus 21

Vs. 1-9 These rules were for all the priests, to emphasize their special position as mediators for the people. The priests were to keep themselves always ready to serve the people before God. They could become unclean (ceremonially unready) in only a few instances. It is interesting that in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus uses this law. The difference was that the beaten man wasn't dead; he was seriously injured. Compassion and mercy were always acceptable reasons to touch others and to risk becoming unclean.

V. 5 These were cultural ways to express grief. Notice that a priest can't have a Mohawk.

Vs. 6-9 Again, these rules are symbolic of separation and holiness, emphasizing the special calling of the priest. It should be noted that the mention of prostitutes in v. 7 would be referring to ex-prostitutes. One of the women (there were actually two notable Gentile women) in the line of Christ was an ex-prostitute named Rahab. She is related to Jesus, but she couldn't have married a priest.

Vs. 10-15 These rules were for the high priest. In grief, he couldn't even let his hair look wild or tear his clothes.

V. 15 gets expanded upon in Ezekiel 44:22. A priest could marry the widow of a priest. Again, there wasn't anything wrong with widows. Ruth was a widow and a Gentile and was in the line of Christ, but she couldn't have married the high priest. These were living object lessons and symbols pointing to a separated life of service for God in the ministry to the people.

Do you think it is fair for God to have such high standards for the priests? Do you think that it is fair for God to have high standards for those who follow Christ? We are saved by grace, so why should there be any standards at all? Look at Ephesians 4:1-6 and Philippians 1:27-30. If you look at what Jesus says about discipleship, it all begins with denial of self and carrying a cross to our deaths, just like He did. That is being separated unto Him to work in His harvest for His glory.

Vs. 16-24 Understanding God's symbolism here helps to balance the fact that this portion seems hard. Unlike our situation as disciples, where some who have disabilities do a better job witnessing and representing God than those without disabilities, the priests had to be whole in every way.

I think it was God's way of saying that you offer the most healthy, the most robust. You give the sacrifice that costs you the most. In a sense, those with disabilities had been preselected by the Lord not to serve as priests, since God was responsible for the disability. With sacrifices (this happened in Malachi's day) people thought that because times were tough it would be ok to offer a lamed animal in sacrifice. It wasn't good for anything anyway, so why not give it in sacrifice. I think the people eventually had the same thought toward the priests. They didn't really do anything all day except for a couple of sacrifices. They really didn't bring anything to the table, so let anyone be a priest. Save the able-bodied men to serve in the army, be movie stars, etc.; and let the others be priests. As time went on I don't think they revered the priest like he was really important.

I've heard this said of people who have gone into fulltime ministry who had very special talents and abilities or an amazing education. People say, "He became a missionary? What a waste."

Anyway, we can learn something about God in all of this, but we don't have to complain; because in the grace of Christ, in our work in the harvest, all of us are used by the Lord. Some of the real heroes of faith, since Christ, have lived in mind staggering poverty, been scarred by family or persecution, been disabled, and have had little or no education. They have defied death to share Christ. They have hidden with other Christians in dark corners of the world to entrust the

truth and make disciples. They have died for Christ as martyrs and have been murdered without justice or discovery. And we won't even know their names until we meet them in heaven.

Leviticus 22:1-16

There are lots of rules here that serve as "object" lessons. What do you see as the focus of this section? What are the key words?

Vs. 1-9 This was specifically addressed to the priests to make sure they were "clean" and ready, so that when the people brought their sacrifices they could both sacrifice and enjoy their portion before the Lord.

Vs. 10-16 These were the people who could eat the offerings. Again, there was to be a sense of reverence, importance and privilege in receiving and eating these offerings. God gave them this as a daily reminder of the redemption He was working and the separation (holiness) they should have toward His work.

For all of our rhetoric that our role models should just be looked at like normal people and not held to a higher standard, we still want them to live to a higher standard. We subtly accept sin as normal by watching TV, but if a preacher or politician becomes guilty of sin, we rightly draw the line. Those guys who represent people should live to a higher standard. I agree. God wanted the priests of Israel to live to a higher standard, showing that it was possible to live completely for God, because they represented the people before God.

The application to us as disciples following our Lord in this time of harvest should be obvious. We are called to be set apart in Christ to be His servants, bearing much fruit, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. Everything else during this time of emergency is either a gift from Him to encourage us, or we should treat it as common. Our calling in Christ is holy and more important than the stuff around us.

Mark 9:1-29

Vs. 1-13

If you are ever on a quiz show and asked, "How many days was it, after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, that Jesus was transfigured before them?" Mark gives you the answer.

Again we see Jesus leading His men into a deeper relationship with Himself even after one of them, Peter, had a major malfunction in his faith and understanding. Jesus was a very patient and perceptive disciple maker.

V. 1 This verse connects what Jesus just said about the Son coming in glory, to what is about to happen. These three would be the first to see Jesus glorified.

Vs. 2-8 Actually Mark doesn't give you the complete answer. You need Mark and Luke. Mark says that Jesus led them up the mountain six days later, but Luke says it is eight days later that Jesus is changed. That means they were up there two days praying before Jesus was transfigured.

Transfigured means that Jesus was changed. It doesn't mean that He only outwardly glowed, but He was entirely metamorphosed (that is literally the word). He became different and they saw Jesus, minus the nail prints, as He appears in heaven, in His glory.

Vs. 9-13 Remember, these three men will become the leaders of the Twelve and will need to give leadership to the others. The road that Jesus leads them on will only get darker and more conflict ridden. This was God's gift to these three men to strengthen them as makers of disciples.

Vs. 14-29 We've seen this before in Matthew 17. It is really interesting how much space is given to this situation. Mark is giving it as much space as the transfiguration. I still need to wrap my

head around this. There must be something about the transfiguration that connects to this struggle of faith.

Note that when Jesus comes down the mountain, the disciples are in an argument with the scribes, probably challenging their correctness and their authority. Paul tells Timothy, the disciple, to stay out of stupid, silly controversies. Arguments seldom settle anything, but you usually walk away emotionally unsettled.

V. 27 Notice that Jesus takes the boy by the hand. Very personal touch.

If you reread Matthew 17, Jesus says they failed to cast out the demon because of their lack of faith. Faith expressed how? In not praying? Were they distracted by the crowd and the conflict with the scribes, and didn't have the courage and presence of mind to huddle together, in front of all those people and detractors and pray?

Maybe the message for us as disciples is that if we become too "crowd" focused, we might lose the power and strength we have in the harvest, which only comes through faith and pounding on the door of heaven. I was reading today and was challenged again by what Jesus says about the mustard seed and faith. Disciples need faith to seek God in the harvest and know His power.

Psalm 43

There is no notation of who might have written this, but if you read yesterday's psalm, you probably figured it out. It looks like another son of Korah.

Vs. 1-2 The psalmist is feeling like the success or threats of the ungodly are somehow a sign of God's rejection. That's how he feels, but he knows better.

Vs. 3-4 It is interesting that he asks for God's Word, His light and truth (the Urim and Thummim of the priest literally mean light and truth and were used for gaining those in decisions). The cry for vindication is followed by the true desire to be close to God, sheltered and led by His light and truth, in His dwelling, before His altar. Nothing I've done gets closer to this than sitting before the Lord after someone has come to Christ. The bruises don't hurt as much. The voices of conflict and doubting become distant and without merit; the reality of the truth seems like a light. There is deep joy, and you're willing to offer even more.

V. 5 So, I ask myself today, *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.* Keep going, keep praying, keep working, and keep trusting. Hold to what the Lord tells you to do, and the Lord will bring you there again.

Proverbs 10:18

Amen.

FEBRUARY 28

Leviticus 22:17-23:44

There are many recurring phrases in the reading today, some of which actually show the structure of the chapters. Keep your highlighter and pencil handy.

Leviticus 22:17-33

Vs. 17-25 We talked a little about this yesterday, that the people had to offer the best animals for their sacrifices. We'll see the abuse of this in Malachi at the end of the year. If the people looked at everything they had as God's provision for them, it would make this easier; yet I'm sure there were situations that arose that made giving one of these animals in sacrifice, a real sacrifice.

V. 21 I never noticed this before, but animals offered for sacrifice couldn't be branded or cut with some identifying mark of ownership. This means that people had to be thinking in advance, at the birth of an animal, whether it would be used for sacrifice or not. This would be another one of those customs that would become a part of daily life and planning.

V. 23 For a *freewill offering* that had nothing to do with sin or guilt or repaying a vow, only thanks and celebration to God, the animal could be a little off.

Vs. 26-28 This must have been a way for the Lord to give them a cultural object lesson in propriety, respect and decency. This sounds very much like not boiling a goat or lamb in its mother's milk.

Vs. 29-30 I think the reason for this was that the celebration was supposed to be fully before the Lord with no thought of taking something home. If everything was supposed to be eaten that day, it was an incentive to invite the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame.

Vs. 31-33 This is the summary that gives the statement of purpose for the passage. The people were to sanctify God, that is, be separate to Him, and make Him special; because God had done that for Israel by saving them and bringing them out of Egypt. It was all based on the love of God and their love for Him.

Leviticus 23

Vs. 1-2 These feasts are more than religious events. They are feasts and celebrations of God's salvation and grace to them. Instead of non-religious holidays like New Year's, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's, May Day, and Halloween, all of the holidays of Israel pointed to God's mercy and their salvation. Two of these feasts would be generational reminders of the flight from Egypt and their salvation. Two of the feasts would remind them of the land and provision being given to them. All of this was a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, as Israel fulfilled its mission to become a light and blessing to the nations. And remember, they were feasts, fun times, to enjoy and celebrate God's blessing to them. This is pretty cool to have this built into their culture.

V. 3 It's funny that the Sabbath was mentioned first, because this was weekly; but the interesting thing is that it is mentioned under "feasts." The Sabbath was not a fast; it was a weekly rest of thanksgiving, remembering God's care. It should have been a weekly celebration.

Vs. 4-8 There are two things here. First came the one day Passover celebration. On the following day the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread began. In the NT when it says that Jesus went up to the "feast" or the "feast of the Passover," this is what is being referred to. Notice that regardless of when the Sabbath occurred during that week, both the first and last day of the feast were to be regarded as Sabbath days; that is, on those two days they could only celebrate.

This yearly feast was to be attended by all the men in Israel to remind them of God's salvation and the flight from Egypt. It was a celebration of their salvation.

Vs. 9-14 During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the day after the Sabbath that occurred in that week, or at the end of that week, came this very special anticipation of the blessings of God. This was at the time of the barley harvest, so barley was the sheaf that was being waved. What you have then is three major events being clustered together: Passover-Unleavened Bread-Firstfruits. It almost seems like a reminder of the salvation in Egypt-salvation through the wilderness-the blessing of the land.

Notice that v. 14 has one of those recurring phrases.

Vs. 15-21 So, once that sheaf was waved, you began counting and looking forward to the next feast. You had all the males in Jerusalem for the Passover-Feast of Unleavened Bread- Firstfruits of the barley harvest. This was linked to the salvation from slavery, flight from Egypt and the anticipation of the coming blessing in the land.

So, the men would all go home. After the wheat harvest, 50 days after the Feast of the Firstfruits, they would appear again for the Feast of Weeks, named for the seven weeks after the firstfruits. This is Pentecost, when we celebrate the birth of the church and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Notice that this feast was designed to signify fullness or completion of blessing. This was the only feast where leavened bread was offered. This signified that the flight was over and that the fullness of the promise was complete. You realize that when the Lord instituted this day, linked to and following the Passover, He already had the birth of the church and the giving of the Spirit in mind.

V. 22 Since God has been talking about feasts and harvests, He reminds the people to leave parts of their fields un-harvested, so as to provide for the poor.

Now come the fall feasts. Just like the three feasts in March, these three feasts in October are all clustered together.

Vs. 23-25 The Feast of Trumpets was a Sabbath beginning the three feasts. All of the males in Israel were required to be at the Day of Atonement, so they probably showed up here. This feast is the symbolic calling of the people to come to receive forgiveness. It's a Sabbath, but it is a feast.

Vs. 26-32 Three days later is the Day of Atonement. This day was not a feast; it was a Sabbath and the only Sabbath in their year when they had to fast.

Vs. 33-44 Five days later was the Feast of Booths. This was a feast when all the people had to make little huts to sleep in to remind them of their journey in the wilderness to the promised land. Notice that they were to rejoice and celebrate before the Lord all seven days.

What hits me is that this looks like the covenant at Mt. Sinai, the trumpet sound before the mountain calling the people, God making the covenant with them, and then God carrying them through the wilderness.

Vs. 41-43 Notice the heart of God in giving this feast. He wanted the people to celebrate His love for them. It appears that although Israel may have celebrated this feast, they didn't do it consistently nor did they make the little hand-made huts. Look at Nehemiah 8:14-17.

Both the feasts in March and the feasts in October have to do with God saving, calling, forgiving, and providing for the people. The reminder that I think is interesting is the Feast of Booths. They needed to remember what it was like in the wilderness with nothing but God to sustain them, over 2,000,000 of them.

Maybe in the western world, we need reminders like this, too, something that helps us appreciate that only God sustains us. It is interesting that most of the world celebrates Christmas and Easter. But the main celebration the Lord has given for His disciples in the harvest involves a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. If you think about that celebration that coincides with the birth of the church and the giving of the Spirit, we can get rid of those unleavened crackers and go back to the warm loaf of bread that symbolizes the fulfillment of blessing.

Mark 9:30-10:12

Particularly now, Jesus is using every incident as a teaching opportunity for His disciples. As those who are now called to make disciples we should probably see this in two ways. First, everything the Lord brings into our lives is designed to lead us closer to Him in following Him in the harvest. Second, as we encourage and mentor others, we should have that same sense of using the stuff of life as opportunities to apply the Word and focus them on following the Lord.

Mark 9:30-50

Vs. 30-32 This shows that Jesus was now preparing them for the completion of His mission and how that would affect them. They didn't understand at all. So why didn't they ask Him? I remember in Algebra when the teacher explained something to me in front of the class and then asked me if I understood. Of course I said, "yes," but I really had no clue. Then I was afraid to ask for fear of looking dumber than I already was.

Vs. 33-37 But they weren't afraid to talk about which of them would be the next in command when He established His kingdom. They still did not believe He would die. They still could only see the Kingdom being established. It was natural for any leader to choose his "right-hand man" out of his immediate group of followers. Jesus waited until they were settled at this house, most likely Peter's, before approaching the subject.

It is interesting that at first they didn't answer Him, but eventually they ask Him (Matt. 18:1). So who was the kid? I'm thinking it wasn't a son of any of the disciples. That would have been playing into their hand. But Jesus was followed by lots of people and many women who supported them out of their means, and it might have been from one of these women. Who knows?

Vs. 38-41 In answer to John's question in v. 38, Jesus says that no one who does a mighty work in Jesus' name will be able to speak ill of Him. How do you balance what Jesus is saying here to what He said in Matthew 7:21-23, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Apparently, motives matter. Doing a mighty work in Jesus' name and not "speaking evil" of Him doesn't equal receiving Him as Savior and Lord. I think what Jesus was aiming at here was that they thought Jesus was forming an exclusive group.

Vs. 42-50 This is a very serious warning and aimed at the disciples. In this context, I would suggest this meaning. Jesus knew there would be diversity among those who would follow Him. Salt and light are important to Him, not Jew/Gentile, educated/illiterate, spotless theology/flawed theology. At the end of this, Jesus tells them to mind their own business and bear fruit (salt in the world) and live at peace with others. To enter into theological or racial conflict with other believers, causing them to stumble and become "unsalt" (give up following) is absolutely wrong. The reality of life is that some of us have spotless theology, yet reach few. Some, in China or in Siberia or the Ukraine, are reaching people for Christ and risking their lives, yet they have very spotty theology. Some of these people are so narrow, that they wouldn't worship with us, and we wouldn't worship with them. Jesus says to His disciples to watch out and be aware of pride and arrogance. Whatever causes a disciple to feel superior and make the weaker brother stumble (read Rom. 14-15) needs to be "cut out" before it causes ruin.

I don't think we can lose our salvation, but like some of the people mentioned in Matthew 7:21, I don't think everyone I've met in church or in Christian service is necessarily a believer. If we constantly are making others stumble and lifting ourselves up, it might indicate that "Christianity" means something other to us, than Christ alone.

V. 49 I think this is referring to the judgment seat of Christ where our work in Christ will either survive or be burned away. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

V. 50 We are to have salt in ourselves (following in the harvest making disciples) and to live at peace with others who are following Christ in the harvest, though perhaps not, in every detail, according to our particular denomination or view of the rapture.

Mark 10:1-12

V. 2 The Pharisees were like fire ants in Texas, always everywhere and ready to sting. There were two very different views of divorce built around two different rabbis. One view was very liberal allowing divorce for everything and the other view was conservative, allowing divorce only for unfaithfulness. What the Pharisees were interested in was trying to find out which "rabbi" Jesus held to.

Vs. 3-9 Jesus answered their question with a question about the Bible and then taught them the Bible. What a great idea.

Vs. 10-12 In the house, the disciples ask Jesus and He tells them the awful truth. In God's eyes a couple is still married after a divorce and when they remarry, as they consummate the relationship with the new spouse, they both commit adultery, breaking the covenant of their first marriage. This is messy business in a dying world where hardness of heart keeps people from being unified in God. God granted a certificate of divorce and laws regarding remarriage, but only because sin keeps us in rebellion to God. The miracle and need for oneness is built into our being, and even in rebellion to God its need for fulfillment is irresistible.

Interesting that Jesus taught them like this instead of giving a schedule and saying, "Next week, Tuesday, 2 p.m., we'll meet at Peter's porch for a lecture on *Scripture and Marriage*." That might have been forgettable, but this discussion, born out of conflict, would always be remembered, and it has been. These are good lessons for us too, as we make disciples in the harvest.

Psalm 44:1-8

Today we only get the first eight verses of this 26-verse cry for help.

Vs. 1-3 The writer, like us, looks to the past and sees the power of God in saving the people.

Vs. 4-8 Based on what he knows from the Bible, he has put his trust in the Lord.

Now comes the real drawing near to God. We see this pattern so often in the psalms and in our lives. God shows us truth and then allows us to suffer. In it all, in a heart of faith, we draw even nearer and learn the truth even deeper.

We live in this tension in following Christ. We "know" Him and we "know" the Word. Yet it is so easy in all of what happens, subtly, to think we are the ones opening doors and pushing everything forward. Then the Lord leads us into a situation where doing everything we've done before doesn't work. We can't even start gasoline on fire. And we realize it always was the Lord. Sometimes the Lord needs to dry up the well, to make us realize the water comes from Him. He alone is the One who brings fruit or success to working in the harvest. We have to be willing to get involved, but then, it is really all from Him.

Proverbs 10:19

I wish I had learned this in my 20's. Still, reading Proverbs like this, it makes you wonder some days if the Spirit isn't giving you a warning. I've had many days when something has come up unexpectedly, and this word of caution from the Lord is exactly what I needed to remember, to honor Him and stay out of trouble.

