

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.