

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.