

Blended Week 11

March 8: Deuteronomy 3-4 and Mark 11:20-33

We continue to read about more of Israel exploits against the nations as they traveled the wilderness. Chapter 5 verse 11 refers to the "bed" of the king of Bashan. This most likely is referring to Og's sarcophagus. The Israelites had been called to completely wipe out their enemies. The king of Bashan would be included in that list. Moses is stating that the only thing left of Bashan is the king's burial place.

Moses begs The LORD to let him come into the Promised Land. He proclaims how wonderful and mighty God is. Moses confesses that there is no god that can do what He does. However, The LORD will still not allow Moses to enter the land. Rather than put the blame on himself, Moses puts the blame on the Israelites. He does this in both chapters of today's reading. Moses had been barred from entering the Promised Land because of how he handled drawing water from the rock in Numbers 20. Moses does the right thing at first, asking God what to do. However, when he assemble the people, he calls the people rebels and asks if "we must draw water" for them. What Moses did there was put himself on equal footing with God. He was judgmental toward the Israelites. Further, rather than give God the credit for drawing water, he takes some credit too. Moses was prideful. We could even go so far as saying that he was guilty of hubris. Hubris is one of my favorite terms from the classic Greek tragedies. It is the excessive pride that makes a person think they have the same power as God.

The fact that Moses blames the people is not quite fair. Certainly, it was their rebellion that caused his frustration. However, they were not responsible for his reaction. Moses was. It cost him the ability to enter the Promised Land. When it comes to sin, it is easier for us to put the blame on someone else. However, when it comes down to it, people can only tempt us to sin. Us as individuals are the ones that commit the sin, not those that tempt us.

In the Mark reading, Jesus talks to the disciples about having faith that can move mountains. As believers, we can have faith that God is going to answer our prayers. God always answers our prayers. His answer is either a "yes", "no", or "wait". Whatever His answer is, we can be sure that it is for His glory and our benefit. Jesus's authority is also challenged by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. They want to know who gave Him the authority to do what He is doing. Jesus asks them where John's baptism came from. Was it from men or heaven. The religious elite do not want to answer because they know that no matter what answer they give, it will not go in their favor. If they answer from heaven, then they are admitting that Jesus is worthy of belief. If they say from man, then the people will be mad at them because they considered John a prophet. I think one of the biggest problems these folks ran into is that they knew the truth, they just did not want to believe it because it meant they would have to change their ways.

March 9: Deuteronomy 5-7 and Mark 12:1-27

Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments to the people. These laws were special because it established a covenant with the people that the other patriarchs did not have. These laws were to keep the people focusing on loving God and loving their neighbors. I want to make mention of

just a couple of these commandments. The people are told not to use The LORD's name in vain. If someone exclaims "Oh my G—" then this is an example of misusing God's name. At the same time, if someone makes a vow, invoking the name of God, but they fail to fulfill the vow, that can also be considered using God's name in vain. We must be careful when we invoke the name of God into trivial things of the earth. The second commandment I wanted to point out is the commandment against adultery. There are several ancient Near East texts outside of Biblical documents that label adultery as "the great sin". This tells us that even pagans were aware of how serious the sin of adultery is.

The people are also given the greatest command. The greatest command is to love The LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. I submit that if we truly follow the greatest command and really give ourselves over to Him, the rest of the commandments will fall into place.

The Israelites are ordered to destroy the pagan nations that they are entering. This was intended for their protection. If they allowed some of them to live, then there was the possibility that they would intermarry. Intermarriage would most likely cause them to start following the false gods of that nation. It was important that they destroy any possibility of falling into idolatry. These people had fallen into idolatry when there was no pagan influence around them. How much more would they be tempted to fall into it if they were living amongst it?

In the Mark reading, Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard owner. The vineyard symbolizes Israel. The tenant farmers represent the leaders of Israel. The mistreated slaves symbolize the Old Testament prophets. We look at the prophets of old with renown, but while they were in Israel making their prophecies, they were hated by the leaders because they were not telling them what the leaders wanted to hear. The beloved son represents Jesus. The owner of the vineyard thinks that surely they will treat the son better than the slaves. Instead of simply beating the son, they kill him and throw him out, indicating that he did not receive a proper burial. God knew that Jesus would go and the people would reject Him and kill Him, but He sent His Son anyway. That is the depth of His love for His creation.

Jesus is asked about a woman who had multiple husbands on earth. Who will be her husband in heaven? Jesus responds that none of the men will be her husband. He explains that when we rise from the dead, we will be like angels in heaven. Often when heaven is portrayed in movies and cartoons, the deceased are shown with harps and wings. That is not what Jesus is talking about here. He is simply stating that the eternal life will not be like it is here on the temporal plane.

March 10: Deuteronomy 8-10 and Mark 12:28-44

The people are implored to remember The LORD. There were so many times in the wilderness that God provided for them, even when they were complaining. They spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, but their clothes never became ratty and their feet did not swell. There were times in their journey that The LORD disciplined His people, but it was for a purpose. Though parents do not enjoy giving discipline to their children, it is necessary for their development. This discipline was necessary for the Israelites' maturity.

They are warned not to get too puffed up with themselves thinking that the reason they are entering the land is because of their righteousness. It is not their righteousness that is earning their way into the Promised Land, it is God's righteousness. Similarly, it is not our righteousness that will earn our way into heaven. Instead, God redeemed us with His righteousness. There is not one of us out there that is sinless. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. So, if we are going to boast in anything, we should boast in The LORD and His righteousness.

To prevent the people from getting too full of themselves, they are reminded of the various sins they committed through their journeys. They are reminded that The LORD asks them to "fear the LORD your God by walking in all His ways, to love Him, and to worship The LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul". How are we doing with that in our lives?

In the New Testament reading, Jesus gives them the most important command. It is to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The command given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy and this one here are one and the same. This is just one example of how God is steadfast and unchanging.

Jesus gives the second command which is to love your neighbor as yourself. A scribe exclaimed that He is correct and that these two commands are greater than the burnt offerings and sacrifice. Jesus affirms the statement. God is more pleased with obedience than He is with sacrifice. If we are living an obedient life, sacrifice will follow.

The disciples and Jesus watch as people are making offerings at the temple. A widow puts two tiny coins worth very little in the offering. Jesus explains that she has given more than any of the others because she gave all she had. The rest were giving out of their surplus. In this instance it comes down to the matter of the heart. The people giving in their excess essentially made sure that they had what they needed before giving to The LORD. This woman did not worry about what she needed. Instead, she gave to God, showing incredible trust in Him.

March 11: Deuteronomy 11-13 and Mark 13:1-13

The Israelites are instructed to teach their children about what they endured during their wilderness journey. They have a rich past of God taking care of them. He pulled them out of Egypt, giving them a lot of riches on the way out. He made a way through the Red Sea so that they could escape from Pharaoh's army. When they were thirsty, God provided good water at Mara. He also provided water from the rock. Further, when they were hungry, He had manna rain from the sky for them. It was imperative that the Israelites teach these things to their children so that the children would grow up trusting in The LORD as well.

God gives instructions about eating meat. They can eat meat any time they like as long as it is on the clean list. They also must drain all of the blood from the meat. They can eat the meat whether they themselves are clean or unclean. However, when it comes to making sacrifice to The LORD that is when things become more stringent. There are certain rituals they must follow to present and they must be clean to present the burnt offerings.

They are given instructions about the chosen place of worship. They are to destroy all of the idols and Asherah poles so that they are not tempted to worship the false gods of that nation. The people had already once shown their propensity to fall into idol worship and that is when they were alone. How much more tempted would they be if the idols remained in the land with them? They are not to worship other gods. They are not to tolerate idolatry from anyone. They are also supposed to get rid of the false prophets. There will be people that rise up in the ranks with the sole intention of pulling them away from God. Unfortunately, the same thing happens today.

In the Mark reading, the disciples are walking along and they see the big impressive stones of the temple. One exclaims how impressive they are. Jesus tells them a time is coming when every stone will be thrown down. Jesus also gives the signs of the end of the age. Many today are looking at the news and thinking that we are coming to the end of the age. In fact, I was just talking to someone about that last night. I think rather than worry about when the end is coming, we should be more worried about getting out there and loving them like Jesus, showing the people who He is.

Jesus gives warnings to the believers about the problems and persecution they are going to run into. As believers, they will suffer for His name. Here in the states we don't suffer like some believers do. There are people in foreign nations sharing the Gospel at great risk to their lives. If they are caught, they will be imprisoned and martyred. Following Christ is not for the faint of heart.

March 12: Deuteronomy 14-16 and Mark 13:14-37

When a person is mourning, they are not to cut themselves or shave a bald spot in their head. Cutting and making bald spots were pagan traditions when it came to mourning. They are told again what they can and cannot eat. It makes sense from a medical standpoint when we look at the things they are not allowed to consume. The scaleless fish and shellfish were all bottom feeders. There is no telling what they were eating on the sea floor. They are not allowed to eat any of the carrion birds. These birds ate dead carcasses and there was the possibility the people would be contaminated by it.

In the seventh year, they are to cancel the debts owed them and set their servants free. They are warned against following human nature. If someone came to them asking to borrow money the year before the debts were supposed to be canceled, then the investor is not going to get back much of his money. As a result, they might be inclined to not loan to the person in need. They cannot do that. They should give freely. The servants are to be set free in the seventh year as well. However, if the servant really likes where he is at, then he can have his ear pierced and become a servant for life. From today's standpoint, that statement seems weird. However, servitude back in these times was very different than in the modern context.

The text also repeats the various festivals the people are supposed to observe. They are also given instructions on appointing judges. The judges that are appointed must be upright and not willing to take a bribe. They must be fair in their judgment.

In the Mark reading, there is more information about the end times. Sometimes I am asked if we are in the end times. The best answer I can give is “maybe?”. The reason for uncertain answer is what we read here in Mark 13:32-37. No one knows the day or hour. Since no one knows, it’s better not to stand and watch the sky, waiting for the end to come. Jesus spent a lot more time preaching and teaching about loving Him and serving others. I dare say that it is better for us to focus on doing that rather than waiting for the end. The end is inevitable. One day we will draw our last breath. The hope and prayer is that we will be good and faithful servants to Him while we are here. We have a limited amount of time here on earth. Let’s make the most of it.

March 13: Deuteronomy 17-19 and Mark 14:1-25

The people are given instructions about sacrifices to The LORD. They have to sacrifice an animal that is perfect and without blemish. To sacrifice anything else was detestable. It makes sense that the animal had to be without blemish. It would be easy enough for someone to take an animal that was messed up and present it to The LORD. They could not really do anything with the animal, so they were not really making a sacrifice. To present a blemished animal would be giving The LORD something useless to them, and therefore easy to give up.

God provides instruction on what to do if they find someone in their midst guilty of idolatry. If a person is caught worshipping the moon, the stars, or the sun, they are guilty of idolatry. The sun, moon, and stars are all created beings. The Israelites (and we) are called to worship the Creator, not the created. In order for the accused person to be found guilty, though, there have to be at least two or three witnesses. The people could not simply fabricate lies against someone and have them condemned.

Eventually, the people will get a king. However, their king must be different than the other kings. They are not to use their position to gain large amounts of gold and silver for himself. He is to have a healthy fear of The LORD. As the physical leader of the Israelites, it will be important for him to remember that he still has a boss. Though the king might not be accountable to anyone on the earth, he is still accountable to The LORD.

The people are promised prophets to give them the Word of The LORD. The passage in chapter 18 dealing with prophets has Messianic undertones to it, but the text is more indicative of the prophets like Isaiah, Nehemiah, and the others that will speak God’s words to the people in the Old Testament period. The people are also reminded about the sanctuary cities that they are to maintain. They are also told not to move their borders and take land away from their brothers.

In the Mark reading, Jesus is anointed at Bethany. A woman comes in and pours a bottle of oil of nard on His feet that was worth about a year’s worth of salary. Though the disciple that takes issue with this is not mentioned, we know from other texts that it is Judas. Judas’s claims that if they had sold the nard, they could have given the money to the poor. This is ironic of course since he had no concern for the poor whatsoever. He was worried about filling his own coffers, not about blessing others. When Jesus rebukes him for complaining about this woman’s gift, Judas goes and makes a deal with the chief priests to betray Christ. Beware the self righteous that are only concerned with themselves. Though they have an agenda, it is not The LORD’s.

March 14: Deuteronomy 20 -22 and Mark 14:26-50

The rules for their war are spelled out. In certain cases, they are allowed to let some of the inhabitants live. However, in the case of the lands they are being told to occupy, they are told to go in and eradicate it all. God wants them to do this because He knows that if they don't, then they will be tempted to follow their gods, not Yahweh, the One who delivered them from Egypt. God calls for them to eliminate all of it because He knows that if they don't completely pull the roots of their paganism out, then it will come back.

God also gives provision for those getting ready to fight in war. If they have built houses, but not dedicated them then they should go back and dedicate it so that they can enjoy the fruit of their labor. He is not guaranteeing that all of them will come back. Instead, He is allowing for the soldiers that have started something to go back home and complete it before making their way to battle.

Favoritism is forbidden in the passing of land to the firstborn. Even if the firstborn was born to an "unloved" wife, then that child should receive the double inheritance. We saw before how the favorite of Jacob was treated by his brothers.

The people are also warned again about adultery and lying to prospective spouses. Adultery terrible even by pagan standards, so it is fitting that God's people would continue warning against it.

In the New Testament reading Jesus and the disciples walk from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus tells them all that they will run away from Him, but Peter puffs himself up and says that he will not, even if he has to give his life up for Jesus. I admire Peter's bravado here, but he will eventually deny Jesus three times in that single night. It is a lot easier to say what we are going to do in a situation before the situation arises. As believers, we should have a plan for when people come after us for our belief. Further, we should practice it out since we don't know when we are going to be challenged. My Navy friends will remember it being beaten into our heads that we "Train like you fight and fight like you train". We would run all kinds of drills to make sure that when the real thing happened, we would know what to do.

As Jesus prays in the garden, Judas shows up with the temple police to arrest Jesus. Peter, in a rage draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priests slave. Though this account does not say it, Jesus heals the ear of the servant. Just as Jesus said, they all deserted Him when He was arrested.

March 15: Deuteronomy 23-25 and Mark 14:51-72

In Deuteronomy, we read about fairness laws and other commands for the people. If a slave escapes from his master and moves within their gates, they are not to return him. Instead, he is allowed to stay. Both men and women are forbidden from being cult prostitutes. We would think this was a "No brainer." However, one thing about the cult practices of the time (and why they were so popular), is that they had to do with sex. In these cults, that is how they worshipped their deity. The people are also forbidden from charging interest on loans. Further, if they keep

collateral, such as the cloak of a poor person, they are to return the cloak at night so that the borrower can keep warm while he sleeps. One thing is certain from these rules and regulations that God is giving: He is concerned with taking care of the poor, the widow, and the fatherless. As His followers, we should do the same.

They are instructed on how to keep the family line going in the event two brothers live on the same property. If one dies without a son, the brother is to marry his sister in law with the intent of having a son with her to carry on the family name. This was known as the levirate custom from the Latin “Levir” meaning brother in law. Progeny was important to them. If we look at Abraham’s call, we see that there is the promise of lots of descendants. The people wanted children to pass their property and possessions to. Preserving the family name was incredibly important to them!

In the New Testament reading we read about the effects of Judas’s betrayal. Yesterday, we learned that every one of Christ’s disciples abandoned Him when He was arrested. Now, Mark tells us of a certain young man that was wearing a linen cloth around his body. They grabbed at the cloth and he was so determined to get away, he left the cloth behind and ran away naked. He would rather run through town naked than be identified as being with Jesus. Though we are not told who this person was, most scholars believe that it was none other than John Mark, the author of this Gospel narrative.

Jesus goes before the Sanhedrin while Peter follows from a distance. Jesus is accused of threatening to destroy the temple and raise it in three days. Rather than answer their accusations, Christ keeps silent. He knows that no matter what He says, their minds are made up. The only time He speaks is when He is asked by the high priest if He is the Messiah. Jesus replies, “I am, and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” With that, the scribes, priests, and the rest of the religious elite decide they have enough to charge Jesus with blasphemy.