

Blended Week 6

February 1: Exodus 27-28 and Matthew 21:23-46

God continues to give Moses guidance on constructing things for the tabernacle. We learn about the precise requirements God has for the altar, the courtyard, and who stands watch over the lampstand oil at night. We also learn about what the priestly garments were to look like. One thing that we can learn from these measurements is how precise God wants things. We don't follow the sacrifices the way that Moses and the Israelites did. However, we are still called to obedience. God desires our obedience before our sacrifice. I humbly submit that if we are obedient, it will drive us to sacrifice.

The priestly garments were ornate and beautiful. They were adorned with twelve gemstones bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes. On the priest's forehead was a golden plaque that said, "HOLY TO THE LORD". This was not to say that the priest himself was holy to the LORD. Instead, the entire people group, the Israelites, they are Holy to The LORD.

In our New Testament reading, Jesus gives one of my favorite parables. He tells about the two sons. One is told to go and work the vineyard. He says he will, but he never does. The second son is told to work the field, but he says no. Later, he changes his mind and goes to work the field. Jesus then asks who did the father's will. The answer of course was the second son. Even though he had initially denied doing what God wanted him to do, he repents and follows instructions. The first son merely looks the part of doing what God wants, but there is no action behind it.

When it comes to faith, it's not about "looking the part." We are called to follow Jesus. Not all of us are going to look the same, come from the same area, have the same cultural norms. As believers we might have different cultures, but we have One Savior and He unites us as a body of believers. Some of us are going to have pasts that seem crazy compared to our upbringing. When it comes to the things of The LORD, the past doesn't matter because Christ's blood wipes away all of our transgressions. Further, it is not our actions that will get us into heaven. It's not about "looking good" for people to see what good acts we are doing. The fact is that there are no good works we can do to enter heaven. The only thing that saves us is the blood of Jesus. It was His work on the cross that paved our way to salvation, not ours.

February 2: Exodus 29-30 and Matthew 22:1-22

We see the holiness practices that Aaron and his sons must go through in order to serve as priests. There is a lot of blood involved. Further, the sacrificial requirement is given. They are to sacrifice two two-year-old lambs every day. One is sacrificed in the morning, the other at night. Sin is a bloody business. As pretty and ornate as the priests' garments were, it seems to me they would be constantly covered in blood from the sacrifice requirement. Throughout the history of the Israelites, blood was shed for the atonement of sin. It seems a lot cleaner to us these days because Christ's blood gives us atonement. No longer are we required to sacrifice two lambs a day. Instead, The Lamb was given as the ultimate sacrifice.

I have always been curious about the anointing oil they are told to make. I wonder what it smelled like. I also wonder if anyone has made this oil since the text expressly forbids anyone from making it for unauthorized purposes.

In the Matthew reading Jesus continues to explain that He has come not just to save the Israelites. He has come to save everyone. Unfortunately, since the Israelites were expecting the Messiah to come and free them from the Romans, they would wind up missing Him whereas the Gentiles and other sinners would follow Him with no problem. The individual mentioned in verse 11 that is not dressed for the wedding is an interesting occurrence. This particular man did not belong to the wedding party. He said he belongs, but his clothes do not match the celebration. This man represents the people that call Jesus Lord, but their lack of true faith and repentance offends Him. Faith costs us something. We are supposed to repent of our sins and follow Him as Lord and Savior. To be sure, we will continue to be sinful until the day we die. However, we should be working toward being more like our Savior every single day. What the text is warning against is the notion that we can do whatever we want, willfully sin in any way, pay lip service to Christ, and then still join eternity with Him. Faith costs us more than mere lip service.

February 3: Exodus 31-33 and Matthew 22:23-46

God calls Bezalel by name to be the skilled worker to fashion all the ornate things in the Tabernacle. God also gives instructions about the Sabbath. The Sabbath was meant to give the people a day of rest. To be sure, rest is important. It is so important that God makes it a commandment. As believers, we should strive to have a day of rest throughout the week.

While Moses is up on Mount Sinai, the people go to Aaron and have them make a god for them. Rather than deny their request, he takes their gold, melts it down, and fashions a golden calf. This was no accident. Moloch, a false deity worshipped by other nations at the time, took the form of a calf. God is upset about what His people have done and He is ready to wipe them from the earth. Moses intervenes on their behalf.

Moses comes down from the mountain and is so mad when he sees the people worshipping this man-made object, he throws the tablets down and breaks them. He confronts Aaron. Notice that he puts the blame on Aaron for what is happening here. He asks him, "What did these people do to you that you led them into such a grave sin?" Aaron should have been a leader and stopped the bad idea rather than going along with it. He did not and rather than take the responsibility, he puts the onus on the people, stating that they are intent on evil. Regardless of whether the people around us are intent on evil or not, that does not give us the excuse to go against God's Law.

Moses assembles the Levites. They take up arms against those that were worshipping the golden calf. Remember back in Genesis 49, when Jacob is describing his sons, he talks about Levi being violent. We see his tribe's violence on display in Exodus 32.

In the Matthew reading, we see two different religious groups trying to catch Jesus with a trick. The Sadducees do not even believe in the resurrection of the dead. However, they go to Jesus and ask what happens if a woman's husband dies and she remarries, who she will be married to

in heaven. Jesus explains that in heaven there is no giving in marriage. The Pharisees see that the Sadducees did not have any luck tricking Him, so they ask Jesus what command in the law is the greatest. Jesus responds that the first is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” That is the greatest command. The second is similar. It is to love your neighbor as yourself. If we take these two commands seriously, the rest of the commandments will fall into place. If we love God, then we are going to worship Him only, we will not use His name in vain, and we will live lives that honor Him. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, then we will not lie, steal, or covet.

February 4: Exodus 34-36 and Matthew 23:1-22

Since Moses had broken the first two tablets that contained the Ten Commandments, he had to go back up Mount Sinai with two new tablets. While there, God reiterates His covenant with His people. God promises that He will drive out the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They are not to make a treaty with any nations inhabiting the land they are going to enter. God gives commands again about not worshipping gods of the other nations and orders that the temples, idols, and Asherah poles be torn down in the land.

Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and we are told that his face is radiant. This causes him to cover his face with a veil when he is not speaking. Today, we have interactions with The LORD. However, we are not necessarily radiant from our walk with Him. Can others tell that something is different about us from our walk with The LORD?

The people begin building the tabernacle. Free will offerings abound. In fact, it gets to the point that the people are ordered not to bring any more. The Israelites are being generous with what The LORD has given them. Are we generous with what He has given us?

In the New Testament reading, Jesus goes up against the religious hypocrites. Let's face it, none of us like a hypocrite. I had a "leader" on one of my ships that was incredibly hypocritical and toxic. No one wanted to do what he said because he himself was unwilling to abide by what he was telling folks to do. As you can imagine, it was hard to get anyone to do anything. If the leader did not take the mission seriously, why should they?

As believers, we should strive to lead by example. The problem during Christ's time was that the religious elite were making the people do things that they were unwilling to do. They merely told people how to live while not living that way themselves. Unfortunately, in some pockets, that problem persists today. Whenever someone starts a conversation by saying, "I am a good Christian", I know that the conversation is getting ready to go south very quickly. Generally, there is a "but" after the statement and then comes the judgment of someone else. As believers, the more we walk with Jesus, the more sinful we realize we are. The more sinful we realize we are, the more we realize just how much we need Jesus. As believers, we know there is no way that we will get into heaven by our own works or merits, it all comes down to Jesus and what He did for us. I humbly submit that it is our job as believers not to change someone, but instead introduce that person to the One who changed us. We cannot change someone, but Jesus sure can!

February 5: Exodus 37-38 and Matthew 23:23-39

Bezalel is hard at work. He uses the exact measurements given to him and constructs the Ark of the Covenant. God will use the space in between the two cherubim on top of the ark as a throne. He also makes the table, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, the bronze basin, and the courtyard. The text indicates that Bezalel made the bronze basin and its stand from the bronze of the women who served at the tent of meeting. Very little is known about these women since they are not referred to much throughout the Bible. They are mentioned again in 1 Samuel 2:22-25. This is one of those mysteries that we will not know about on this side of heaven. Clearly, they played some important role because they were mentioned in the Bible, but exactly what it was, we are unsure of.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus continues His diatribe against the religious hypocrites. What Jesus is trying to get through to them is that it does not matter how nice something looks on the outside, it is what is on the inside that counts. Many years ago, when I was very junior in the navy, I said something to the effect of “looking good on paper.” To which someone in my chain of command said, “Rather than look good, why not be good?” That statement stuck with me through my career. Looks can be deceiving. The Pharisees and the Sadducees looked nice and shiny on the outside. They looked like they followed the law, but inside of them was death. They were like whitewashed tombs. My hope and prayer is that we don’t worry about looking nice and shiny on the outside. Truly what matters is what is on the inside.

February 6: Exodus 39-40 and Matthew 24:1-22

Bezalel makes the priestly garments. They are completed exactly as The LORD has required. The priestly garments were so ornate and covered in expensive jewels. It is hard to imagine that these folks were responsible for going and sacrificing two sheep a day. I have never been a butcher, but I have seen how bloodied their garments can become. The same would have happened for these priests.

The Tabernacle and everything that was supposed to be in it are complete. They assemble the tent, Aaron and his sons are anointed and consecrated as priests. The glory of The LORD fills the Tabernacle and not even Moses can enter it. When the cloud covers the tent of meeting, the Israelites remain in their spots. When the cloud is gone, the Israelites travel in the wilderness.

In our New Testament reading, Jesus tells the people that the Temple will be destroyed. He also warns them about the end of the age. Jesus tells them that tribulation is on the way. There will be wars and rumors of wars. There will also be famines and earthquakes. False teachers will rise up and lead people astray. The LORD also uses imagery from Daniel about the “abomination that causes desolation.”

I am not one to get into the debate of when will it all end. I think I was around ten years old when I remember people telling me that the world was coming to an end soon. That was many years ago. The fact is that these things have been happening for a very long time. As believers, it is not for us to worry about the end and when it will happen. Instead, we should be out there serving and teaching the Gospel. We have not been called to live in fear of the future and the

persecutions ahead. Instead, we are called to have full faith in The LORD. He will give us the peace that surpasses all understanding!

February 7: Leviticus 1-3 and Matthew 24: 23-51

The name for Leviticus comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, meaning “relating to the Levites”. This book contains information for their priestly duties and service in the Tabernacle, but it contains several other laws.

The burnt offering is the first of five offerings that can be made. The first three that are mentioned are voluntary gifts. The last two are required. The burnt offering was more of an offering for general sinfulness. The “he” that the text directs to place his hands on the animal’s head is the person making the offering, not Aaron or his sons. The grain offering was made to acknowledge God as the source of prosperity and provision. It was an offering made to give thanks to God for what He has given the individual. The fine flour referred to wheat that produced a fine white flour.

There were three kinds of fellowship offerings. They were thanksgiving, votive, and freewill. The fellowship offering was given to signify communion between the believer and God. This was the ONLY sacrifice that the worshiper ate the shared meal with the priests.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus is telling the people that no one knows the day or hour in which the end will come. It will be just like in the days of Noah. The people were eating and drinking and giving in marriage. Then it started to rain. Likewise, people will have stopped looking for His return. Christ explains that if a homeowner knew when the thief was coming, he would not have left his home. Instead, he would have stayed and waited for the thief. We do not know when He will return, so we must remain vigilant. Jesus speaks of the two men working the field and two women grinding at the mill. One remains while the other disappears. Since we do not know the day or hour, we continue to be Christ’s hands and feet in our communities.

February 8: Leviticus 4-6 and Matthew 25:1-30

We read about the requirements for a sin offering. Sins committed unintentionally must still be accounted for even though the individual did not mean to. The result of the sin is still there and must be atoned for. Sin is serious business whether we meant to engage in the sinful activity or not. The text refers to the “anointed priest” indicating the high priest. The sin offering varied based on the degrees of responsibility for the one that committed the sin. The high priest would have to provide an unblemished young bull when he sinned. The collective congregation required a young bull for theirs. A leader in the community had to bring an unblemished male goat. A common person had to provide an unblemished female goat.

The text gives us explanations on when sin offerings are required. If a person swindles his neighbor, he has to make it right with the neighbor, but still must make a sacrifice for the sin.

God also explains how Aaron and his sons are to handle these offerings. The burnt offering’s ashes must be taken outside of the camp. For the grain offering, the priest is to remove a handful

of the fine flour and olive oil and burn it on the altar. The sin offering has to be slaughtered before The LORD in a holy place.

In our New Testament reading, Jesus continues to warn about remaining vigilant for His return. He tells the parable of the ten virgins that are waiting outside for the bridegroom. Five of them brought all the oil they needed, the other five were foolish and figured they would get it when they needed it. The groom was delayed and showed up in the middle of the night. ALL the women were sleeping when he arrived. Only the five that had enough oil were allowed into the banquet. The other five had to go back into town to find someone to sell them the oil. By the time they made it back, it was too late. I have known people in my life that knew they needed The LORD. They knew that He was the way, but they were intent on not making Him Lord of their lives until they were close to death. The idea was that they wanted to have as much fun as possible and then at the last minute make a deathbed confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. To a degree, this parable teaches against that mentality. We do not know when we are going to draw our last breath. If we know that Jesus is Lord, better to confess Him now and be ready than to wait until later. If you are feeling called to follow Christ, there is no time like the present!

Jesus also teaches the parable of the talents. In this case, they are dealing with money. One servant receives five talents, the second servant receives two, and the third receives one. The first two talents put the money to work and double the investment. The third one hides his talent. When it comes time to present the talents back to the master, he is furious with the one that did nothing with what he was given. God has given us talents and other abilities. We should use these the way God intended us to use them.