

Blended Week 8

February 15: Leviticus 20-21 and Matthew 28

The LORD tells Moses to prohibit worship of Molech. Infant sacrifice was one of the tenets of worshipping Molech. The Israelites are not to offer their children to Molech. The Israelites are not to turn to mediums or diviners. God is their source of knowledge and protection. God also gives another warning against pagan sexual practices.

The people are to keep all of The LORD's statutes and ordinances. They are to be holy and set apart. They are to be holy, just as the LORD is holy.

Any of Aaron's sons that have physical defects are forbidden from coming near to present the food of his God. However, this does not mean that these men are cut off from doing priestly duties. In fact, they are allowed to eat the food, they simply cannot present it. This demonstrates God's demand for perfection. God is holy and perfect.

The only way that we can become holy and perfect is to repent and confess Christ as Lord. In the Matthew chapter, we see that Christ holds the victory over death. The women were coming to anoint Him in His tomb, but when they arrived, they found that He was not there. Death could not hold Jesus. Since we are His, death does not hold victory over us either. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. His blood not only covers our sins, but it wipes it completely away, like it never even happened. Praise God Almighty that sent His only begotten Son to free us from our sins and the grip of death!

February 16: Leviticus 22-23 and Mark 1:1-22

God gives commands about how the priests are to conduct themselves. Just like everyone else in the camp, they can also become unclean. They are not more holy than anyone else in the camp, they can still have issues, they can still sin. When this happens, they must go through the cleansing ritual. Otherwise, if they show up to offer the sacrifice, God is going to strike them down. Over time, we will see the role of priest change to an attitude of "Holier than thou". Christ will spend a fair amount of time decrying their hypocrisy. (We read some of that already in Matthew's Gospel account).

Again, they are given instruction on what kind of animal to bring. It must be without blemish. If there is a discharge or something is wrong with it from an outward appearance, odds are there was something wrong with it internally as well. The animal would not be used by the people, so they certainly should not offer it to God.

God gives instructions for holy days. He is serious about the people enjoying a Sabbath. They are to take a day of complete rest and practice self denial. The point of the rest day is to sit back and let God do all of the work. When we step back, take a break for a bit, and then get back into doing whatever it is, we will find that many times God has still been working while we were resting. The point of the Sabbath is to give us rest, but it is also to remind ourselves that we are reliant on God, not on ourselves.

We start the Gospel account of Mark. Mark is the Gospel that gets right down to business. He does not give us a whole lot of detail, but he hits the high points. It's almost like a "Cliff's Notes" version. John the Baptist comes to herald Messiah, just as the prophets had said. Jesus is baptized and immediately goes into the wilderness for His temptation. After that He goes to Galilee and calls the first disciples. Mark's Gospel emphasizes action and deeds. Jesus is on the move!

February 17: Leviticus 24-25 and Mark 1:23-45

There is a case of blasphemy that arises. The son of an Israelite woman and Egyptian father cursed and blasphemed the Name. To blaspheme the Name of God was to blaspheme God Himself. Because the name Yahweh was considered so sacred, the Jews stopped using it altogether and referred to God as "the Name". God pronounces that the person committing the sin bears responsibility for the sin. That truth remains today. A popular refrain when we mess up is to say "the devil made me do it." That is not entirely true, though. We are merely tempted. Being tempted is not committing sin. However, giving into the temptation is. The enemy cannot make us do anything. We bear the responsibility of the sin. However, as believers, our sins are washed away by the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

God gives specific instructions about observing Sabbath years and the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee was very special because that is when debts were canceled and slaves were set free. God commands them to be fair in how they handle selling land and other goods. God expects fair treatment of everyone in the camp.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus continues working. A man with an unclean spirit was in the synagogue. The spirit cried out asking why He has come. Jesus rebukes him and the unclean spirit comes out of him. After this, Jesus goes to Simon and Andrew's house with James and John. Simon's mother in law was lying in bed with a fever. Jesus heals her. Her first response to being healed by Jesus is to get up and serve. Did we do the same when we came to faith in Christ? When He wiped away our sin did we get up and serve Him?

Jesus goes to preach in Galilee. He had come to preach and He was going to fulfill that mission. A man with a serious skin disease (most likely leprosy) came to Christ and stated that "if You are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus responds that He is willing and heals the man. Jesus tells the man not to let anyone know what He has done for him. The man paid no attention to the command and went out and told the people about the power of Christ. As a result, Jesus could not go into a city with people asking Him to do some miracle in their lives. Even when He remained out in the deserted places, they would come find Him. When do we seek Jesus? Is it only when we need something? Part of the problem with some of these folks is they were looking at Jesus as a magic genie that could cure what ailed them, not the Messiah. As believers, we should strive to walk with God and fellowship with Him daily, not just when we are in trouble and need Him to bail us out.

February 18: Leviticus 26-27 and Mark 2

God gives the people a conditional covenant. If they will walk in His ways and follows His statutes, then He will give them rain when the time is right. They will enjoy land that produces abundantly and their trees will bear fruit. God has some covenants that are unconditional. His covenant with Abraham was unconditional. God told Abraham that He would give him a lot of offspring, so many that it would be like counting the stars of the sky. In Abraham's life, he had a few missteps, but God kept His covenant. This covenant in Leviticus 26 requires a response from the people. Unfortunately, the people will eventually fall so far away that He will send them on the exile. They do not hold up their end of the bargain, so God allows it to play out the way that He said He would. In all that, though, He promises that if the people turn from their ways, humble themselves, and seek Him, He will be there to receive them. No matter how far we may think we have gotten away from God, we merely need to turn around and He is there.

We read about paying money to redeem people. If someone was dedicated to the LORD, the person could be purchased for a set amount of money. We also read about redemption of consecrated fields and consecrated homes.

In Mark, Jesus is in Capernaum. The people find out that He is there, so they all crowd into the home that He is in. There are so many people there that there is no room in the door. Four friends bring their paralytic friend, but seeing that they cannot get their friend into the house, they climb up onto the roof, open it up, and lower their buddy into the room. It was not just the faith of the paralytic man that got him to Jesus to be healed; it was the faith of his friends. As believers, our circles matter. That is not to say we should not have secular friends. However, it is vitally important that we have believing friends that we can bear burdens with.

Matthew, a tax collector is called to be a disciple. The religious elite find that Jesus is dining with tax collectors and sinners. When they question Jesus about it, He responds that healthy people do not need a doctor. We do not go to a hospital expecting to find healthy people. Similarly, we should not go to a church expecting to find perfect people. The only One that is perfect is Christ Himself.

Jesus explains that they need to get ready for things to be different through the parable of the wine skin and cloth. The new teachings will not necessarily be compatible with the old way of the Pharisees and Sadducees methods. It should be noted that the standard of perfection and the standard for redemption of sin did not change at all. Jesus will later say that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. The method of atonement was completed in the work of Christ. His sacrifice ended the offering of animals for forgiveness of sin. Further, the Pharisees and Sadducees had taken God's law and twisted it. Jesus had come to correct them, live a perfect life, die on the cross to atone for our sins, and resurrect, showing His power over death. The Pharisees and Sadducees could not see it then and they will not see it throughout the Gospel narratives.

February 19: Numbers 1-2 and Mark 3:1-21

The English name for Numbers is derived from the two military censuses conducted in the book. The Hebrew title, Bemidbar (במדבר), means "In the Wilderness". The Hebrew title describes the

geographical setting for this book. They will travel from the wilderness of Sinai to the Plains of Moab, and across the Jordan River from Jericho.

Their first order of business is to conduct a military census. Any male 20 year old or more was to be registered. When they finished conducting the census, the total of military men came out to 603,550. The Levites are not among those counted. They have special duties surrounding the Tabernacle. They are responsible for moving it and setting it back up as they travel. The Levites were given this task because of their zealous actions defending the faith after the incident with the golden calf.

The LORD gives guidance on how the ancestral houses are supposed to camp around the Tabernacle. If we were to get an aerial view of the Israelites at camp, we would see that they fan out in the shape of a cross.

In our New Testament reading, the Pharisees are watching to see what Jesus will do when a man with a paralytic hand is brought to Him. Jesus asks them point blank if it is lawful on the Sabbath to do what is good. They all remain silent. Jesus heals the man and then suddenly they are in an uproar with charges of blasphemy.

We might think that it was just the Pharisees and the Sadducees that had a problem with Jesus. We read in chapter 3:20 that even Christ's family members thought that He was crazy and tried to restrain Him. So, if our family or friends ever look at us like we are crazy for believing in Christ, we can take heart, because even our Savior's family members thought He was insane and tried to stop Him.

February 20: Numbers 3-4 and Mark 3:22-35

We read about all of the duties of the various Levite clans. The Kohathites were responsible for the "most holy objects". The most holy objects included the ark of the covenant, the bronze laver, and the seven tiered menorah. They are given specific instructions on how to handle these items. I am certain that they dared not violate what God's commands were after they heard about Nadab and Abihu and the consequences for offering unauthorized fire. The Gershonites are responsible for transporting the tabernacle curtains. The Merarites are responsible for carrying the supports of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, and bases.

This leaves us to the question of who had the most important job? They all did. Every single person was needed to make the movement of the tabernacle happen. The same can be said of serving The LORD today. God has given us all gifts and talents to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Fulfilling the Great Commission is a team effort!

In the New Testament reading Jesus is accused of having a demon. He rebuts the accusation, stating that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus also warns about the danger of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus is teaching this the crowd informs Him that His mother and brothers are there. Jesus states that His family are the people that do the will of God. This might seem harsh, but we must

remember that just a little while ago His family thought He was crazy for doing the things He was doing and saying the things He was saying. To be part of the family of God is to do the Father's will.

February 21: Numbers 5-6 and Mark 4:1-20

Numbers five gives instructions on separating the clean from the unclean. God also gives instructions on what to do when someone sins against another. Not only could they sin against God, but against each other. The people are also given instructions for husbands when they become jealous. The text indicates that the hypothetical wife has had an adulterous affair. She has not admitted to it, but the husband has a sneaking suspicion. Rather than take matters into his own hands, the husband is to take her to the priest with a jealousy offering. While this might seem like the husband is airing out dirty laundry in the family, I think it was more to prevent abuse. The husband would not know one way or another, so he was not to lob allegations one way or the other. He could not discern the truth, so the matter needed to be taken elsewhere.

We read about the requirements for a Nazirite vow. One of the more famous Nazarenes was Samson. He was a Nazirite from birth. Not all Nazirite vows were lifelong vows. They were expected to abstain from anything derived from grapes. The vineyard denoted a sedentary lifestyle, to eat grapes could cause them to lose total devotion to The LORD. They also were not to cut their hair, an outward symbol so that others could recognize the vow they had taken.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus gives the parable of the sower. The sower goes and sows seed. Some falls on the hard ground, some falls in the shallow soil, some in the weeds. Those groups do not yield a fruitful crop. However, some of the seed landed in the good soil. This seed produces a crop that is 30, 60, and 100 times greater than what was sown. As believers, we are called to spread the seed of the gospel. Thankfully, The LORD takes care of the rest. If we sew, the word might fall on hard hearts, in shallow hearts, or hearts bogged down by the worries of the world, but that does not mean we should just stop. Keep sewing knowing that God will take it from there.

February 22: Numbers 7 and Mark 4:21-41

There is a lot of repetition in Numbers 7. We see that all of the tribal representatives bring the same offerings to the tabernacle. This shows that all of the tribal leaders had an equal role in religious practices. No tribe had more of a share in the religious practices and no tribe had less responsibility. The same is true today. Believers are all equals in the sight of God. There is no hierarchy, we all unite under the banner of Christ. Our chief end is to worship God and enjoy Him abundantly. My prayer is that we all go into the world with a spirit of worship and that we give ourselves over completely to The LORD acting as living sacrifices for Him.

In Mark, Jesus continues to use more parables. He compares the kingdom of God to a field that had been planted. The farmer sowed the seed, but after that, he does not do anything else. Instead, he wakes up and goes to bed and the crop grows. God does the work of producing the crop. We simply sew the seed.

We also read about when they are crossing the Sea of Galilee. A storm comes up and they are all terrified. The boat is rocking all over the place, it is swamped. The disciples are worried they are going to sink. During this time of distress, they find Jesus sleeping in the stern. They wake Him and He calms the sea by telling it to be still and silent. As believers, we can rest in the fact that God has it all under control. Life comes at us fast and sometimes things go wrong from our perspective. This is nothing that God cannot get us through. We can relax and let God do the work. In the bitter storms of life, we can take a nap and relax, God is greater than any problem we might come up against.