

17. In the presence of God

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When I was a kid, I was one of those kids who couldn't fit in any group well. I was not very athletic and am still not. If it has anything to do with catching or throwing I was close to pathetic. That is why I was the last one to be picked whenever we played stick ball games. Actually, each team captain encouraged the other team to take me, because I could do more harm than help to the team.

While they were talking about which team should accept me, I was hoping that I would be a winning team. Even though I didn't know how to play well, I just wanted to be in the winning side like anyone of us.

When we are in the presence of God, we are on the ultimate winning team. Because God has never lost a fight or war to anyone. There is no competition, period. Oh yes, Hollywood tries to make satan look like God's ultimate contender. Satan is nothing more than a pawn in God's master plan.

This morning, the Lord is expounding one of His Ten Commandments and talks about His Son's presence with these Israelites in the wilderness.

A. NO CHEATING

Exodus 23:1-9 "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. 2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. 4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. 6 "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. 7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. 8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. 9 Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

This is an amplification of the ninth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," a warning not to endorse falsehood and promote injustice because of what the crowd is doing. Like the jury's decision for O.J. Simpson's case not very long after that infamous L.A. Riot.

We might say, "I am not a judge. So this command doesn't effect me." Not so quick, homie. What about judging other people under the influence of our bias opinion or selfish motives?

Please remember that reputation is what others think about us, but character is what God knows about us. Guess which one is more important.

Our goodness should be the result of obeying laws by practicing love for others.

I've noticed that young people want to look different than their moms and dads, but they all end up looking just like each other. I guess that is what we call "Fashion."

B. GOD'S SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS

Exodus 23:10-13 "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, 11 but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove. 12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed. 13 And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

Sabbath day and Sabbath year have not only a good physical reason to rest, but it is about trusting God to provide their needs. Besides, this is God's way to provide extra for those who are poor.

It is interesting to note that folk today who claim to be Sabbath keepers, are attempting to keep only the Sabbath day. They ignore the Sabbath year and disregard completely the year of Jubilee.

C. THE THREE ANNUAL FEASTS

Exodus 23:14-19 "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: 15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); 16 and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. 17 Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. 18 You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. 19 The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

There are three major annual feasts in Israel by tradition:

"The Feast of Unleavened Bread," a.k.a. "Passover" speaks of the death of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

"The Feast of Harvest," a.k.a. "the Feast of Firstfruits" or "the Feast of Pentecost" is a type of His resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

"The Feast of Ingathering," a.k.a. "the Feast of Tabernacles" reminds us of His coming again and the future kingdom of joy and fullness that is described in Zechariah 14:16-21.

The last portion of v19 sounds strange to us, but it has something to do with the pagan fertility ritual that was existing in that region.

But because of strange rabbinical interpretations, today this command is the reason why an observant Jew cannot eat any dairy products with beef. The rabbis insisted that the meat may have come from the calf of the cow that gave the milk for the

cheese, and the cheese and the meat would “boil” together by one’s stomach acid, and be a violation of this command. Non-sense! But they are very strict about it.

D. THE PRESENCE OF GOD BEFORE THEM

Exodus 23:20-33 “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. 22 But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. 23 For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. 24 You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. 25 So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. 26 No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. 27 “I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. 28 And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. 29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. 31 And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. 32 You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. 33 They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

The Angel mentioned in here is obviously Jesus Christ. Who else can forgive people’s sins and carry the wonderful name of God? None other than Jesus, the Son of the Living God who used to show Himself in a human form during the time of the OT.

The flip side of v22 is that God can be our enemy when we choose to stand with our enemy. Even though He loves us very much, He wouldn’t put up with our double-minded hearts for Him and the passions for the worldly things.

Their ownership of the land was purely by God’s grace, but their enjoyment of the land depended on their faith and faithfulness.

God has not guaranteed these same blessings to His New Testament people today as He did for the Israelites here. But He has promised to supply all our needs and enable us to live in victory over our spiritual enemies. Much of the “prosperity preaching” of our modern day from the Faith Movement teachers is based on a mis-interpretation of the Old Covenant that God made with the Jews.

Israel did conquer the Promised Land and destroy the cities and idols of the godless inhabitants. But gradually, God’s people began to make treaties with their neighbors and learn to worship their false gods and goddesses. This led to disciplines by the Lord. Before we judge Israel too severely for this, we need to ask ourselves how much God’s people today are compromising with the gods of this world, such as money, pleasure and success.

God is not asking us to go out and do anything special, but simply trusting in Him. Guess what? We even have a hard time doing that simple thing. We really can trust Him because He has proved Himself worthy of our trust.

In the presence of God, we find the peace that passes all men's understanding.
In the presence of God, we find the hope that allows us to face tomorrow and eternity.

In the presence of God, we find the strength that goes beyond our capabilities.
In the presence of God, we find the love of God that we can share with others.

The territory for Israel that the Lord mentioned was much bigger than they'd ever possessed in history. It was the Israelites' choice not to have them by not following the Lord whole heartedly.

We have been granted every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. But we will only possess what we will partner with Him in faith and obedience to receive.

E. CONFIRMING THE COVENANT

Exodus 24:1-8 Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2 And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him." 3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." 4 And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. 6 And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." 8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

The covenant was confirmed with sacrifices and the sprinkling of the blood on the Book of the Law and on the people who agreed to obey it. The blood on the altar spoke of God's gracious forgiveness of sin, while the blood sprinkled on the people committed them to a life of obedience. Believers today have been sprinkled by the blood of Christ in a spiritual sense and are committed to obey His will.

Aren't you glad that we don't sprinkle the animal's blood all over the congregation now?

F. A FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN MOUNT SINAI

Exodus 24:9-11 Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. 11 But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.

It is difficult to say exactly what they saw. Most likely they saw a heavenly vision of God, after the pattern of Isaiah 6 or Ezekiel 1.

G. CLOSER TO THE LORD OR AWAY FROM HIM

Exodus 24:12-16 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them." 13 So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14 And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed Aaron and Hur are with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them." 15 Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. 16 Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17 The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. 18 So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

I'd like you guys to pay attention to a handful of people who were at this location Mount Sinai:

Joshua - He followed Moses up to the peak to meet God. He became Moses' successor, because he had a heart to draw near to the Lord.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Aaron - Aaron must have gone down from the Mount, because we find him in chapter 32 helping the people make the golden calf. When we abandon our place of ministry, we not only sin ourselves, but we may lead others into sin.

Nadab and Abihu - They were given the gracious privilege of seeing the glory of God, and yet later they presumptuously disobeyed God and were slain. It is possible to come near to God and still walk away and sin. How important it is that our personal worship of the Lord result in a clean heart and a right spirit, because great privileges bring with them even greater responsibilities.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Our goodness should be the result of obeying laws by practicing love for others.
- 2) By our choice, we can make the Lord our greatest ally or enemy.
- 3) We have been granted every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. But we will only possess what we will partner with Him in faith and obedience to receive.