

Exod 03-11-02a

As we continue our worship this morning, let's take a moment at this point to clear our minds, remind ourselves that we are in the presence of the Lord God. Where two or three are gathered in my name, Jesus said, there am I in the midst. It is a reminder that God takes our fellowship seriously.

He notes the condition of our heart. He is ready to minister His word to our souls. He is leaning forward, as it were, wanting to bring us to maturity, to increase our fruitfulness.

The branch that produces fruit, He prunes so that it will bear more fruit. And that means that things are clipped away, things that have been there a long time. Sometimes I pick up an old book.

In fact, many times I pick up old books. I have a lot in my library. I have some that were published back in the early 1800s.

And I'll be leafing through and turn to a page and I'll see a little piece flake off and drop off of a page. And I think, you know, that little scrap of paper has been in that book for 175 years. And I just now separated it, dislodged it.

It will no longer continue with that book. It has fallen away. And you think, well, should I get that little scrap and try to glue it back on? But if it's not functional, if it's not necessary, then there's no point in doing it.

And when you think about a tree that has branches, it may have been that that branch originally grew from the trunk of the tree dozens of years ago. But if that branch dies and is unfruitful, the tree trimming guy will come and saw it off. And that's what God does with our lives.

And a lot of times we look at different branches of our existence, different avenues of thought or different avenues of belief or of mindset that have been with us such a long time. And we think, well, I've always thought this way. I've always operated this way.

This has just always been a part of my life. And it comes time for the pruning so that we can be more fruitful. And we're very reluctant to let that thing go.

We have nostalgia for it. We have a sense of attachment for it. But sentiment is no substitute for fruitfulness.

And the branch that is not fruitful, God cuts off and gathers into bundles that are burned. The branches that are fruitful, it says he prunes so that it will bear more fruit. And we can expect that if we are growing, there will be things that get pruned away in our lives.

And we should be prepared for it. We should acknowledge and recognize that process when it

takes place. And not think of it as a loss of something that was cut away, but as something that is going to enable us to be more useful and more productive in God's plan.

None of that can take place unless God's Word and God's Spirit are active in our lives. God's judgment is perfect. God's knowledge of us is perfect.

God's plan for us is perfect. And our maximum happiness and our maximum blessing and our maximum productivity comes when we are in the center of God's will and God's plan. It may not always make sense to us, but guess what? That's why we're not God, because we don't know the best thing.

You look at a four-year-old child, trying to explain to them why certain things do happen and don't happen. They can't wrap their mind around it. You say, well, are we going to let the four-year-old run the family or are we going to let the parents run the family? Who's wiser? Same thing in our spiritual life.

So there is no more important time for us than when we allow ourselves to be edified and built up by the ministry of God's Spirit under the instruction from God's Word. There is an equally important time for us, and that is when we exhale. Taking in the Word of God is sort of like taking a breath in, but we also have to exhale.

We have to apply what we learn. You can't constantly be inhaling pretty soon. You reach a maximum limit and pass out.

There is a cycle of intake and output that is necessary for us, and so we don't say, well, I went to church or I went to Bible study or I've meditated on the Word of God, so I'm good to go. It is at the point of application that the cycle is complete. So this is all essential to our function, our productivity, and our future as believers in God's plan.

So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, it is a wonderful blessing to know that it is not by our might. It is not by our power.

It's not our strength or our talent or our ability. It is Your Spirit and Your Word that enables us and empowers us to live the life that You have called us to. We thank You for the preservation of Your Word by those who have been faithful down through the years, through the centuries, to safeguard it, to copy it, to publish it, to make it available so that each of us can own as many copies of Your Word as we desire.

We can carry it with us. We can search it. We can study it.

We can meditate on it with complete freedom, with no end of opportunity. We thank You that in these latter days, as the challenges of international life and our national existence increase, that Your provision for us has equally increased. We have many faithful men who preach and teach Your Word.

We thank You for them, for those who have gone before us and on whose shoulders we stand as we study and try to understand the deeper things of Your Word. And we thank You that the return of Your Son, the Lord Jesus, is near at hand. We thank You for the time that remains to us in this life, and we pray that our study this morning will equip us to redeem that time and make the best use of it so that we will be thoroughly furnished unto all good works, both in this life and the next.

We thank You for our nation, for our government, for those who have the rule over us. We pray that You will continue to lead and guide those who are believers of like faith, who recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and who are seeking to be pleasing in Your sight as they exercise the functions of their office. We pray for our President, for our Congress, Senators, the Judiciary, those in the military service, those who are in all the different levels of the Pentagon and in national, state, and local government.

We pray that Your hand will be on them and that we will continue to enjoy a time of freedom. We have no warfare on our own shores or within our borders. We have even been free from terrorist attacks in recent months and years, and we thank You for Your grace and Your provision for us in terms of opportunity, and we pray that we can make the best use of this time as possible.

We ask Your blessing on us now. Give us concentration and understanding. May we glean from Your Word those things that You would equip us with for the days ahead.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 65.

Isaiah chapter 65. If you're on autopilot, you'll probably be going to the Psalms, but then you'll miss the chapter because we're in Isaiah. This is following up on an idea that we began to explore last week, having to do with the return, the cameo appearance of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, in Exodus chapter 18.

Isaiah 65 says, and this is the Lord speaking, I was sought by those who did not ask for me. I was found by those who did not seek me. I said, here I am, here I am, to a nation that was not called by my name.

I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good according to their own thoughts, a people who provoke me to anger continually to my face, who sacrifice in gardens and burn incense on altars of brick, who sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs, who eat swine's flesh and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels, who say, keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you. These are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before me, I will not keep silence but will repay, even repay into their bosom.

Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, says the Lord, who have burned

incense on the mountains and blasphemed me on the hills. Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom. Thus says the Lord, as the new wine is found in the cluster and one says, do not destroy it for a blessing is in it, so will I do for my servants' sake that I may not destroy them all.

I will bring forth descendants from Jacob and from Judah and heir of my mountains. My chosen, my elect shall inherit it and my servants shall dwell there. Sharon shall be a fold of flocks and the valley of Acre, a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.

But you are those who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who prepare a table for Gad and who furnish a drink offering for many. Gad and many, by the way, are local Canaanite deities. Therefore I will number you for the sword and you shall all bow down to the slaughter, because when I called, you did not answer.

When I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before my eyes and chose that in which I do not delight. Therefore thus says the Lord God, behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry. Behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty.

Behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed. Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart and wail for grief of spirit. You shall leave your name as a curse to my chosen, for the Lord God will slay you and call his servants by another name.

So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth, and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth, because the former troubles are forgotten and because they are hidden from my eyes. This is a reminder that in any group of people, this is specifically looking at the nation of Israel, circa 600 B.C., there is a, actually this is probably circa 721 B.C., but in any group of people in any nation who claim to be Christians, who claim to be believers in this case, there are those who give lip service and are actually busy doing something else. There are those who are completely apathetic and indifferent and unresponsive, and there are always those who do seek and who do try to understand and apply what can be known of God.

This chapter talks about the fact that God was sought by those who did not ask for him. You have to know the name of something. You know, some of the commercials used to say, ask for it by name.

You know, go into a store and say, can you bring me, can you find me the Folgers, or can you find me the Maxwell House, or can you find me the, some other brand of coffee. If you know it by name, you can ask for it. Otherwise, you're just looking in general terms, and someone has to try to figure out what it is you want.

Notice, I was sought by those who did not ask for me. Now, people have come to this chapter and come to these passages and said, there were people that were just bebopping along, and

God sort of thunderstruck them like Saul on the road to Damascus, and said, I'm the Lord God, you better believe in me and get with it, and here's the faith you need, and he inoculates them with it, injects them with it. And that's not the case at all.

What does it say? What are the first three words there? I was sought. These people were seeking. He doesn't say, I was found by those who did not ask for me.

He says, I was sought. Now, these are people who are not in the nation of Israel. They are not people who have the information that comes down through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Yet, they are seeking. They just don't know what it is they're seeking. They know they don't have what they need, and they're looking.

They say, I need something more than what I've got in the spiritual realm. This is God consciousness, and it is a positive response at the point of conviction by God the Holy Spirit in the area of sin and righteousness and judgment. Someone says, there's got to be more to life than this.

Where is the meaning? Where is the purpose? Where is hope for the future? Where are the eternal things? And they begin to seek, and they begin to ask. And many people will take detours and torturous paths before they find what it is they seek. But God says, I was sought by those who did not ask for me.

They don't know his name, but they are seeking. He says, I was found by those who did not seek me. This again is by name.

I was sought, and I was found by those who did not ask for me and did not seek me. This is seek in the sense of by name. There's an ancient, in fact there's a painting that's been done.

Who's the man that was running around with a lantern trying to find a wise man? My brain cell is not yet awake that has his name stored. There's a famous man who was going through the streets of Rome or something with a lantern trying to find an honest man or a righteous man or an intelligent man. And there's a famous painting of him doing that.

His bearded face, and he's got this expression of almost hopelessness because he's running through the streets and he can't find what he's looking for. He's looking for, see I'm looking for his name, and I'm seeking it and can't find it in the caverns of my mind. I was sought by those who did not ask for me.

I was found by those who did not seek me. It almost seems contradictory, doesn't it? Because he says I was sought in verse 1, and he says they weren't seeking me in verse 2. But they were seeking, they weren't seeking him because they didn't know his name. They didn't know the identity of the one they were seeking, but they were seeking something because you have that phrase, that verb in verse 1. Now, by contrast, here are people who are seeking and they are finding God, and yet there are those who do know his name, who do have information about

him, this nation of Israel, that God says, here I am, here I am, to a nation that is not called by his name.

Actually, that's still talking about these ones who are seeking. But in verse 2, I've stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good according to their own thoughts. There's a contrast between the nation of Israel and these people sort of in a fog who are feeling about, they can't see, they don't know the name or the shape of what they're looking for, but they are seeking.

And here's the nation of Israel who has all of the answers, who has access to the information, and yet they rebel. A rebellious people, you know, they had the James Dean movie, remember the name of that? Rebel without a cause. And this is someone who, you know, is just, you know, there's a famous line in there where he says, well, what are you against? And he says, well, what have you got? You know, he's just looking for something to pick a fight over.

This is not the kind of rebellion that is in view here. To have a genuine rebellion, you have to have something that you're rebelling against. There's no such thing as a rebel without a cause.

You're just angry. You're just contentious. You're just a bully or somebody who likes a good fight.

But you're not a rebel. Rebel, in the strict definition of the term, you are rebelling against something that exists in the status quo, rebelling against authority usually. So these rebellious people know they are aware of the information that the people in verse 1 are trying to find.

And when they know it, they rebel against it. They reject it. No, that's not what I want.

I'm sick of this law of Moses. I'm sick of this ritual system. I'm sick of having to not do what my neighbors here in the land of Canaan do.

They seem to be prospering. They seem to be happy. They seem to be having a good time going down to the temples of prostitution and this kind of thing under the guise of being religious.

They seem to be having a good time, and I'm stuck in the mud here, so I don't like this. I'm going to rebel against it. God says, I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people.

Now, looking at this, what people are there that God does not touch? What people are there that don't know about God? Well, there aren't any, are there? There's two kinds of people, the ones that God knows and calls by His name and holds His hands out to, and they rebel as a whole, as a group. And then you have these who don't know about Him, who are on the outside of the nation of Israel, who, when they seek, they find Him. And although they don't know His name, because they are looking, God is revealed.

So God is revealed to those outside of Israel. God is revealed to those who are in Israel. There's no third group.

Everyone receives a revelation of God. God says in verse 3, A people who provoke me to anger continually to my face, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on altars of brick. If you go back, the law specified that the altar was to be made out of unhewn stones.

And these are brick. This is a violation. This is like putting the Ark of the Covenant on an ox cart, instead of carrying it by the poles that God specified.

So they modify worship to fit their own ideas. Sacrificing in gardens, this goes back to the Ashtoreth, Ishtar, Esther, the whole idea of wood and trees and this kind of thing, poles, Asherah poles. This all took place in gardens.

When you go look at the Book of Judges, and you see Jerubah all and some of the others going and tearing down the pagan worship, you find that they are in groves, they are on hilltops, these are gardens. It was sort of a naturistic, tree-hugging kind of a religion. They also sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs, eating swine's flesh and a broth of abominable things.

This is probably like clam chowder and seafood, things that were forbidden in the law. And other unclean animals in broths. What does this mean? They are disregarding the instructions that God gave them.

So we think, well, that was sure a messed up crowd. And you have these others who are outside of Israel who are seeking something and they are finding God, even though initially they didn't know His name. Yet the people that belong to God.

A classic example of this is the Book of Jonah. The picture in Jonah is that the people of God, Yonah means dove in Hebrew. And they are known for their flightiness.

They will divert as they fly. They will spook away. They will change direction.

They are not consistent. They are not steady. Do you want to be a lion resting under the shade of a tree or do you want to be a dove that is flighty or fickle in that sense? And Jonah is sent to Nineveh, capital of a pagan nation.

And when he says you are about to be destroyed, they drop what they are doing. They stop their wickedness. They put on sackcloth and ashes and change their mind.

Not so much about God. It's not that they all got converted and there was a big revival. But the picture is God confronted them about their wicked ways and they stopped.

They said we need to do something different. When God says the same thing to His own people, they don't respond. And God says look, the pagans have got more on the ball than you do.

And this is consistent throughout the scriptures. You have the parable of the unjust steward. Jesus said the children of this generation are wiser than the children of light.

The sons of light because they look ahead. The unjust steward saw he was going to get fired because he had been skimming and doing some unauthorized business, making some profit for himself with his master's goods. And when he got caught and knew he was going to be out of a job, he calls people in and he says, well, let me adjust your bill so that it's more fair.

The markup that I put on that I was going to keep for myself, I'll take that off and you'll just pay a fair amount to my master because I'm going to be out of here in a few days. And Jesus says the master commended the unjust steward that he's firing, not for his initial skimming, but he says, you know, the guy's at least thinking ahead. He's trying to make things right for these customers so that he'll have friends in the future.

He's trying to line his nest. He says I can't dig and I'm too proud to beg. I've got to try to plan ahead.

And Jesus said people in this world a lot of times are wiser in the sense of looking ahead and planning ahead than people who belong to God. Same thing here. Sit among the graves, spend the night in the tombs.

We've seen the association with death. When Saul gets anointed and is about to become the Nagid, the ruler in Israel, he has these signs that take place by Rachel's tomb, by the place where the nurse for Rebecca is buried. And then he gets these false prophets who are a bunch of charismatic speaking in tongues guys who fall down and do the dying cockroach, and he does it with them.

And it's death, it's emptiness. And God says look at yourselves. I've got people on the outside trying to come in and find out about God.

You're my people called by my name, descendants of Abraham, children of faith, stewards of the mysteries of God, and you're rebellious, you're apathetic, you're indifferent. I hold out my hands all day long and you don't pay attention. They say keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you.

We have this holier than thou phrase in our language, don't we? This is an attitude that crops up, especially if someone comes to correct us. And don't answer this out loud, nobody raise your hand, everybody play poker. But have you ever been in a dispute, usually in your own household, and you point out that somebody malfunctioned in some way, somebody failed to do something, somebody did something wrong, left something out that was supposed to be in or whatever, and you say, hey, you know, you left this thing out, or this is some area where you have failed.

And someone comes back and says, well, what about you? And you get this ad hominem thing where instead of dealing with the issue at hand, by the way, I'm not talking about anything in

my recent experience, but this is such as is common to man. When you get in a dispute, a lot of times rather than dealing with the issue at hand, here is something that wasn't done that should have been, or something that was not done, or vice versa. And somebody brings it back and says, well, what about you? And they say, you know, well, what I did wasn't as bad as what you did.

And you start having this one-upsmanship, oh, yeah, we'll remember when, and you start dragging up the past and opening old graves and bringing out the stench of the tomb of old things that should have remained buried. Well, this is what they call *ad hominem*, which is against the man, argument against the man. If you find yourself at a disadvantage because you have, in fact, messed up in some way, and someone is pointing it out, and you want to take the heat off, why you try to say, look, maybe I did this small thing, but you've done worse, so leave me alone.

And you start trying to even the scale. Verse 5, keep to yourself, don't come near to me. I am better than you.

I may have my problems, but I'm better than you. If you want to talk about failure, let me tell you a few things about you. Well, this is part and parcel of those who have a bad attitude toward God.

You know what this means on the flip side? If we are a healthy, growing believer, and someone points something out to us, and it always hurts. There is not a person alive that likes to be told that they're wrong, that likes to be told that they made a mistake, that likes to be pointed out in their flaws. But our natural human nature is to respond in kind.

You punch, I counterpunch. You point, I counterpoint. You mention something, I'm going to mention something.

You know, what are you standing there being holier than, I'm holier than thou. You know, and this is what we do. The mark of a growing believer, the fruit of the Spirit, is self-control.

And when that urge rises, which it will, and guess what? It is not a sin to be tempted. It is not a sin to think, wait a minute, what are you saying to me? It is a sin to pursue that, to let it flower and bear fruit, and come out your mouth, and remain in your attitude. We see it come up.

We say, you know, this is that old, sinful, corrupt human nature. This is not my new nature. This is not what God calls me to.

Can I just say, you know, you're right. I've got to try to do better. Maybe you can help me do better.

Maybe if you help me a little more around. You can't go down that road. Have to stop.

Have to just absorb it. This is the whole idea. The Lord did not respond.

How many things could Jesus have said? All the details of all of these holier than thou Pharisees, slapping him, pulling out his beard. These that abused him in his trials. He opened not his mouth.

It doesn't say that he didn't have a lot of thoughts running through his mind, that he was having to pick off one by one and say, that's a sin, that's a sin, that's a sin. Can't do that, can't do that. It is not a sin to be tempted.

Do not think that you have already failed and, oh, what the heck. Let me just go ahead and finish up here, since I'm already having this bad attitude. It is not a sin to be tempted.

It is a sin to give in to temptation. We are all tempted in this area. Grievously so.

And it's like, always think of a weapon. You know, when you're back in the military and you're taking weapons apart and you have to spend all day long cleaning rifles. Occasionally, I was on a detail where we had to go down to the armory, because part of the whole cycle of qualifying with a rifle is, they've got all these rifles that you check out and use.

So they would send whole squads of guys down there to do nothing but clean rifle after rifle after rifle after rifle. You get all these M16s and you take one apart and clean it. You take it for inspection.

You turn it in and get another one. You just do this all day long. So you see a lot of different weapons.

And some of them you could tell that by constant use, the sear, the mechanism in between the trigger and the firing pin, has had a lot of use and has begun to wear down on either a .45 caliber pistol or on an M16. You could see that the mechanism is worn. And so some weapons, you have to pull the trigger hard to get it to fire.

Others, especially ones that have been fired a lot, you just barely touch it. In fact, guys used to file down the sear because they wanted it to have what they call a hair trigger. You just put a little slight pressure on it and it goes off.

And you like that because if it has a stiff pull, you tend to jerk and throw your aim off as you're firing. So a sear that is worn down just has a hair trigger. Well, sometimes by frequent failure, we wear down the sear in our soul and we are on a hair trigger.

And it takes a very slight provocation and we just fall into a pattern that we have always done. And you think, you know, there's no way to unwear that part in a weapon. That's just the way I am.

I can't change. I'm sorry. You're wrong.

We can change because God provides replacement parts. We can be restored. We can be renewed.

We can be given strength where we don't have it. So this attitude in verse 5, This attitude is something we have got to shake. We've got to get rid of it.

Why? God says, These people are a stench in my nose. Now I don't know about you, but the God of the universe who has secured my salvation, who's preparing my eternal future, I don't want to be a stench in his nose. These are a stench in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

Fire always speaks of judgment. God says, if you're going to be acrid smoke in my nose, why? I'll just light a little hotter fire that doesn't smoke and we'll take care of this problem. What's the whole idea of the bosom? This is where precious and valuable things are kept.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus. After death, where is Lazarus? Abraham's bosom. This is a picture of nearness, of comfort, of security, of being held dear.

John's head rests in the Lord's bosom when he's sitting at supper. It's a place of holding something close. Guess what? If we do not shake this holier-than-thou attitude, this rebellious attitude toward God, apathy toward God, God will hit us where it hurts the most.

We will be repaid where it hurts the most. Because this is where it bothers God the most. God doesn't require a lot of us.

He just requires faith. He just requires obedience. And when we fail, after all that He has done for us, He says, if you're not going to do that which is important to me, I will strike you where things are important to you to get your attention.

This is not retributive. It is not retribution. It's not punishment just for the sake of getting even.

This is designed to turn us. If there is something distracting us, something we find more important than the Word of God and obedience to God, then maybe God needs to take that away. I will not keep silence.

I will repay, even repay into their bosom, your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together. Notice fathers, plural. This would be at least two previous generations.

And this is a reference to the three-generation curse. In Old Testament days, which is not true any longer, I could take you to the scriptures that show where this is revoked. But in Old Testament days, if a family generation rejected God, and the sons did the same, and the grandsons did the same, after three generations in a family line, God would cut that family line off in Israel.

This was called the three-generation curse. This was necessary to maintain enough of a remnant in Israel, and leave enough room for those who did have faith, and also to make a point. Later on, God says, it used to be that the father would bite the bitter grape, and the son's teeth would be set on edge.

But He says, not any longer. Now, everybody is going to bite his own grape and get his own

comeuppance. Burned incense on the mountains, blasphemy in the hills.

I will measure their former work into their bosom. Now, I will give you one of the most unpopular doctrines in the Word of God right here. The Word of God says, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God has separated our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. However, you think about the parable of the servant who owed his master a debt, a great debt. It's on the order of \$150,000 if you convert it into today's money.

And his master forgives him that debt. Then he goes off, and there he has an underling, a servant below him, who owes him something like 25 bucks. And he puts grievous pressure on this individual, and says, pay it now.

I want the money now. The man says, I don't have it. Give me some time.

He says, no way. And he throws him into debtor's prison, because he won't pay the \$25. The master hears about it, calls him in, and he says, how could you do this? I forgave you a \$150,000 debt.

You put this man below you in prison for a \$25 debt. Didn't you learn anything from the mercy I showed you? Guess what? Your debt is reinstated, and you are going to prison until you pay every penny. God takes forgiveness seriously.

God takes grudge bearing seriously. And if we cannot get over real or perceived wrongs against us, if we do not forgive and forget, God will not forgive, and God will not forget in time. Verse 7, Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, say the Lord, who have burned incense on the mountains, blaspheme me on the hills, I will measure their former work into their bosom.

A continued pattern of sin not only results in no forgiveness for that pattern, but you can have your old sins reinstated. Now, that's a harsh doctrine, but that is in the Word of God. There just isn't any way around it.

Normally, former work is forgotten. Normally, it is forgiven, it is removed. But, in this specific case, where we do not forgive others, we ourselves will not be forgiven.

And in fact, what had been forgiven can be unforgiven. So, a reminder of how seriously God takes us. Well, all of this, believe it or not, impinges on Exodus chapter 18, because these who were not called by God's name, who were seeking, have found Him.

And yet, there is a rebellious people to whom God stretches out His hands, and they don't. And this episode in Exodus chapter 18 with Jethro is extremely important by way of contrast and by way of making this particular point. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see why Scripture includes this account of Jethro's visit out

of sequence, out of chronological order, puts it here right as Israel arrives at Mount Sinai. And what the priesthood and the sacrifice involved in this really entails. But let's pause here and take our break.