

Exod 04-01-18a

This is Sunday, January 18th, 2004. We continue our study in the Book of Exodus, starting Chapter 21. And as we do, let's take a moment at the outset to clear our minds, make sure our hearts are prepared for the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, so that as we look at the truth of God's Word, it will be meaningful, it will stay with us, it will be something that affects us in a positive way in the days and weeks to come.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for all of the many manifestations of your grace that have sustained us and have brought us together on this morning to worship and fellowship in all of the bounty that you have granted to us. We thank you for the spiritual gifts that you have distributed amongst us and the blessing that we receive from the presence of each one who is here. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ and for his work on our behalf in taking us from a lost and hopeless condition and entering us into heights and potentials that even the angels are not privy to.

We thank you for the struggles and the challenges that we face. We know that you have designed our lives to enable our progress and to further our growth and to test our faith, and we pray that you will be with us as we study your Word this morning. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will find our hearts ready and fertile soil in which to plant the seed of your Word.

We pray that we can bear fruit, that you will prune us so that we can bear more fruit and reflect the glory of our Savior, and we ask it in his name, Amen. For our Scripture reading this morning, I need to preface it by reading our passage in Exodus 21. So we're going to look at Exodus 21 in terms of its content and then go to our Scripture reading.

Otherwise, I will have a much more gymnastic time trying to link our Scripture reading and our passage. Exodus chapter 21, Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments, followed by the challenge to the people to not be afraid, however they are afraid, Moses reassures them, we went into great detail, God has come to test you, don't be afraid, but they are afraid and they stand afar off and only Moses marches forward onto the mountain. So we concluded by looking at these rather oddly inserted verses, 24 through 26, an altar of earth you shall make for me, you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings, your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen, every place I record my name I will come to you, I will bless you, if you make an altar of stone do not build it out of hewn stone, if you raise your iron tool upon it or over it, you have profaned it.

And the principle there is we need to be exceedingly careful about embellishing the plan of God and the design of God in various areas, particularly when it comes to worship. Why an altar of earth or stone? Because it is the material that is at hand, it does not require any human manufacture whatsoever except perhaps to pile the stones. Many of the altars you find have 12 stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel and that foreshadows what Paul will say in Romans 12 when we present ourselves a living sacrifice, those 12 tribes as a part of the altar, the place of offering, indicates that this is a personal, that this is related to the people, related to the

nation of Israel in this case in the literal fulfillment, the literal execution of worship.

But to use earth or to use stones requires no human effort and at the place of sacrifice, at the place of atonement, at the place of payment for sin, there is nothing human we can contribute. However, you notice that it does require the individual worshipper to go to the place of worship, to make a place of worship and to accomplish the worship. God doesn't just appear at the foot of the bed.

How many of these stories have you read? I was asleep in my bed and suddenly there was a bright light, I opened my eyes and there was an angel or there was Jesus at the foot of my bed. God did not just appear and say, anytime I appear, worship me. I may appear in the night, I may appear in the day, I may appear in the road, I may appear as you are in conversation around your table, anytime I appear, you should worship me and here is how to do it.

Say the following six words, bow three times, spin around, throw salt over your shoulder and this is the procedure for worship. He doesn't say that. He says, any place where I put my name, that's where you worship me.

You gather the stones, you pile the earth, you perform the offering. We have a responsibility, in other words, to choose and to execute worship in accordance with God's instructions. But there is nothing of human effort involved in the sacrifice itself as far as what is pleasing to God.

The preparation of the animal is something that people had to do. Preparation of the altar is something people had to do. Making sure they were sanctified and that they were not defiled when they offered and approached the presence of God in this way is all their responsibility.

So people like to push the all of grace and all of God idea past the point that the Bible puts it, past the point that the Word of God puts it. When you get into Reformed theology and Calvinism, you find, like I said the other night, people who claim that Christianity is not a crutch, it's a stretcher and you should basically just let go and let God and God will do everything. All through the Bible there is this responsibility for approach, for cleansing, for preparation and to follow the instructions that God gives.

So he says, don't go up by steps on my altar. And this is two concepts rolled into one. First of all, if there are steps ascending to the altar, somebody had to do some work and they say, well, but I didn't raise an iron stone to the altar.

No, you raised an iron stone to make these nice fancy steps that lead up to the altar. He says, even in the approach, don't start adding a bunch of human work. Because as soon as you do that and you go up by steps, instead of the gradual, steady incline that goes up a hill, now you have steps where you have to raise your foot.

Everybody's gone up and down stairs. And what it does is the priestly garment gets raised above the sandals, above the ankle and flesh begins to show. And of course, human flesh is supposed to be covered by the robe.

The priests had sanctified garments that had been sprinkled with blood. And even over in Hebrews chapter 10, when it talks about approach to God in the New Testament sense, it says, let us approach having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. We should be wearing our robe of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ that fully covers us and fully qualifies us.

And none of our imperfection and our humanity, our corruption should show. So that is symbolized in this injunction to not go up by steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it. Nothing wrong with somebody's ankles showing or wearing Bermuda shorts or whatever, but at the point of worship, the formal long robe was to be worn and no flesh was to show.

And it was also in a practical sense to avoid distraction. If you know the way that ancient robes wrapped and all this, you've got an assembled group of people and someone is going to send up a thing. And there is some it's the same reason ladies don't stand on high balconies wearing short dresses with people down below.

It's just distracting, especially in a worship context. So now we come to chapter twenty one. These are the judgments which you shall set before them.

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

If his master has given him a wife and she has born him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, I love my master, my wife and my children, I will not go out free. Then his master shall bring him to the judges.

He shall also bring him to the door or to the door post and his master shall pierce his ear with an all and he shall serve him forever. If a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed.

He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has dealt deceitfully with her. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing and her marriage rights.

If he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free without paying money. So this is a section, these 11 verses on slavery in Israel. Slavery is a charged topic in our history and in our culture and it is like some other hot button topics such as the women's rights movement or abortion or should we go to war in Iraq.

It can trigger just endless debate and you can argue ad infinitum about it without making any progress. This, however, is the word of God to the nation of Israel and we know as a general concept of approach that when we look at the nation of Israel, it is a figure when we go through

our interpretation and application, it is a figure for the individual life of the believer. So the challenge for us is to look at these 11 verses and say, what does slavery mean to me? What useful day by day life application do I draw from God's instructions to Israel about slavery? Well, that brings us to our scripture reading.

Long way around the barn here, but go turn with me now, if you would, to Romans chapter six. Romans chapter six. This chapter begins with a question, what shall we say then, which says, what conclusion shall we draw from what we have just talked about? Romans chapter five can basically be summed up by its first verse.

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What shall we say then? If we have peace through Christ and through the work of Christ, grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life and we are free from the penalty of sin, what shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not. How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Think about Israel in Egypt, in bondage, in slavery, and think about the value of that in spiritual terms that pictures or represents bondage to sin, life before salvation, life before the atoning work of Christ, before the application of the blood to the doorpost, if you will, and before the liberation that follows the great judgment of God on Egypt. In the same way, we have other figures in the Old Testament, especially such as death. Formerly you were dead in trespasses and sin, slavery and death and disease all reflect different aspects of the pre-salvation condition.

Everybody with me so far? There is a parallel between death and slavery, that's our main point. So Paul here is going to talk about both death and slavery in the same chapter. He starts out talking about death and we have to change venues, we have to change environments.

We were alive in the realm of sin and we were dead in the area of God. We need to be alive in the area of God and dead in the area of sin. We need to be living in a different universe and this is what takes place, at least potentially, at the point of our salvation.

Our citizenship papers are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, from bondage to freedom. That is the potential. Now President Bush has an initiative working with the Mexican labor force that seems to traverse the border without benefit of legal right to do so.

I could take a Mexican migrant worker who is crossing the Rio Grande and coming up to chop cotton or whatever he's doing and I could give him American citizenship and give him everything necessary to travel freely by way of right. He could just go to the border and drive across in his little Mexican car. But if I hand him those papers and he continues to sneak across

the border at night, what's the matter with him? He doesn't need to be sneaking across the border.

He's got citizenship. He's got full-blown American rights. But all his life, since he was old enough to work, he's been sneaking across the border at night.

And so after I give him citizenship, after I give him a pass, you know President Bush has this sort of amnesty work pass idea going, and he knows more about it than I do. I hope it's a good idea. But what if somebody got all of that and still was sneaking across, risking their life going across at night, or failing to take advantage of a thing that has been given to them? And that's what we do as believers, when we continue to live in sin.

When Paul says, shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound, well look there's still people sneaking across the river at night. Let's try to hand out some more citizenship papers. Let's try to hand out some more amnesty passes.

That would be the equivalent. I mean it doesn't make any sense. If I give citizenship and passes and things to Mexican workers, should they continue to sneak across the river so that I'll give more of those? It's been done.

It doesn't make any sense. The grace has already abounded to the maximum extent it can for that person. What they need to do is start availing themselves of these new rights, of this new citizenship, this new opportunity that they have.

Certainly not, this is Meganoito, one of the strong Greek negatives. Certainly not. How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death.

Our heavenly citizenship, our rights are in Christ. They don't depend on us. It isn't anything we did.

We can't cue the altar. We can't raise steps to it. It's all of the work of Christ.

Therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death. This is not water baptism. It's not sprinkling.

It's not effusion. It is what the Holy Spirit does at the point of our salvation. It is identifying us with Christ to such an extent that his work is credited to us, his righteousness.

Baptized into Christ and just as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, our old man was crucified with him that the body of sin might be done away with.

Why? Romans 6.6. So that we should no longer be slaves of sin. What does it mean to be a slave of sin? He who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we

shall also live with him knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

Death no longer has dominion over him. Does it seem to you as it seems to me that the Apostle Paul is belaboring this point? He could just say you've died to sin and then move on, but he just keeps turning it around in front of us and saying Christ is alive. We are in him.

We are alive. Christ died. We are in him.

He died. He died to sin. The life he lives, he lives to God.

We are in Christ. Therefore, we should be dead to sin. We should be alive to God.

He just keeps hammering and hammering because it's an important point and he uses two figures, the figure of death and the figure of slavery. Look at verse 10. Death, that he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life that he lives, he lives to God.

Likewise, you also reckon yourselves. This is the very same idea as God with Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him.

It was credited to him. It was accounted to him for righteousness. When we look at our lives, and this is not abstract life, this is whatever situation we're currently in.

Every one of us can think right now about challenges that face us, about areas of prosperity that we enjoy, about certain desires that we have to fulfill. We have things we want to do, things that kind of get us motivated. Let me get this other stuff done because I really want to be here and do this or accomplish some goal.

When we survey the landscape of our day, this ought to come into play. I am dead to sin. I am alive to God.

I am free from bondage to sin. I am to live not as a servant, but as a son or daughter of God. I have been transferred not from one form of service to another, but from servanthood to membership in a royal family, to sonship and inheritance, heirship, priesthood, heavenly citizenship.

We have rights and privileges thereunto pertaining. We don't live in Guatemala. We are Americans.

We don't live in Afghanistan or Pakistan or Iraq. We live in America, and there are rights and privileges and opportunities found nowhere else on the planet but in this country. In the same way, being in Christ, not only do we have things that don't belong to unbelievers, we have things that never belong to Israel.

Israel is never told that they have a heavenly citizenship. Israel is never told that they are in Christ. Israel is never told that they are going to inherit with the King of glory.

They are never told that they are going to be the bride of the Son of God, that they are His body and His bride. They did not have the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit available to each one individually all the time. They did not have the seal of the Holy Spirit, the *Erebon*, on them that marked them as a personal, individual possession of God.

None of that is a part of the package for Israel. They are the elder son. They came first.

They were God's people before the church was. But we have this... You notice all of this that Paul is talking about. You've died with Christ, you live with Christ, dead to sin, alive to God.

None of that is told to Israel. Does God ever say you're dead to sin? Does God ever say there is therefore now no condemnation because you're alive and you have the Spirit? Does He ever tell Israel that? They didn't have it. It's not a part of their package.

We do. Likewise, you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Everything hinges on being in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the answer, by the way, a chapter and a half forward when you get to Romans 8, 28 and 29. All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, then He predestined.

And people immediately vapor lock at that point. Predestined what? To be conformed to the image of His Son so that He, the Son, might be the firstborn among many brethren. Our destiny is in Christ.

Christ is the firstborn. And God says, I don't just want my son alone to share this great inheritance. I want him to have many brethren to share it with.

So our predestination is as a class, as a category, whoever trusts in Christ and whoever by faith and patience qualifies for inheriting the promise is going to be in this many brethren that are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. You can be saved and not be conformed to the image of His Son because conformed is a process. It doesn't just say predestined to be in the image.

It says to be conformed. When you conform something, you work a process on it, don't you? You have to chip away and flesh out and mold and model and sculpt and shape and put something into this image. Predestined to be conformed.

It's a process. God is using this earthly life to strengthen our faith and to teach us, enable us to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But everything is in Christ.

Anytime somebody wants to bring up predestination, you just remember the destiny that was established before the foundation of the world is the destiny for Jesus Christ and anyone who is in Him. It is not an individual predestination. There's not a verse in the Bible that says God individually predestined a person to be saved or to be anything else.

God created a class. God created a category into which we can opt in or opt out. Being saved is a necessary prerequisite, but you are not conformed to Christ and you are not a part of the many brethren who share the inheritance just by virtue of salvation.

It is by faith and patience that we inherit the promise. You have need of endurance so that after you have suffered a while, you will inherit. Paul and Peter both stress this point.

We have to qualify. You can go down to Quick Trip or 7-Eleven or someplace and get a winning lottery ticket, theoretically, and they read the numbers over the TV set and here's the whatever they run, the Super Powerball or whatever, and you can have that ticket and it's got all eight numbers or however many they have and there's a \$139 million jackpot down there. But if you don't leave your house and take your ticket down to the jackpot headquarters there, you don't get the money.

Possessing the ticket does not get you the money. Taking the ticket down and cashing it in and authenticating yourself and saying, I am, in fact, Sam Hall who brought this ticket. Here's my ticket.

Here are the numbers. I and I alone have this little piece of paper. Give me the money.

I want it in cash. If I ever did win one of those, I don't want to be waiting for it down the road. I say, give it to me now.

Well, we have an equivalent idea in the spiritual realm. There is an inheritance, but just like creating the altar, assembling the earth, stacking the stones in order to perform worship, there is a part that belongs to us. And we have to step up and participate in God's plan.

God doesn't just drop adversity on people for no good reason and he doesn't just drop blessing on people for no good reason. Jesus said, take up the cross. If you want to end up where I end up, which is the King of Glory in the heavenly realms, millennial kingdom and beyond, then go where I have gone, Jesus says.

Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow. All of those are things that only we can do. God cannot deny me for myself.

I can only deny myself. God cannot drop the cross on my head. I have got to pick it up.

And God cannot drag me by the hair and send me down the same road that Christ went. I am commanded to follow. We are commanded to follow.

These are opportunities that belong to the free. If we were a slave, God could treat us like a slave. Slave has no choice.

Master says, do something, you do it, and there is no real choice. And we are not. We are not slaves.

Jesus tells his disciples in the upper room, I no more call you servants, I call you friends. There is a transition as you move into the church age of freedom from the law and a higher calling. Remember the great thing, the sting of death is sin? And what is the strength of sin? The law.

Did you ever wonder about that? How come death and sin and the law are all tied together? Because by the law comes the knowledge of sin. We can see that in the Old Testament Scriptures. We don't have to be under law now to be conscious of our sin because the Scriptures testify to us.

But this is the background. Romans 6, you can read on down through the rest of that. But as we come back now to Exodus chapter 21, this is sort of the background.

When we look at slavery, this is how it's going to affect us. What do we know about slavery? What do we care about slavery? It is our past. It's where we came from that we are no longer in.

So what God has to say to Israel about slaves and about people in slavery is going to tie in and hook into that area of our spiritual knowledge and that area of our spiritual experience because we can go back and serve sin. We can go back and make ourselves slaves, can't we? By not cashing in our ticket, by not showing our citizenship papers at the border and trying to continue to live like a slave and like our previous life, we'd get none of the benefit and we're back in the realm of slavery. We sell ourselves back into slavery.

Everybody still hanging with my train of thought here? My somewhat laborious train of thought? So now, Exodus 21, these are the judgments which you shall set before them. This is an instruction to Moses. These are the kind of verses that are easy to skip over.

It's just like introductory transitional type of thing. But look, these are the judgments which you shall set before them. There is an intermediary communicator for these truths.

The people have to pay attention to God or to Moses. Well, the immediate source is Moses. The information is coming from God.

We have an analogy in our day. There are those that God has designated to be the conveyors of information and that's what Moses does here for Israel. These are the judgments which you shall set before them.

Moses has a responsibility to get the complete word and the complete message off the mountain and down to the people. If he forgets something and the people go off and do that, well, then Moses has to go answer and say, well, Lord, you know, you talked to me for 40 days. I forgot some of it.

He has a responsibility to know it first himself so well that he can communicate it without any great degree of loss. These are the judgments which you shall set before them. This, by the way, is the reason that when you evaluate a pastor or a Bible teacher and decide whether or not you're going to attend their church or listen to their message or whatever, and I say this

with some chagrin myself, but there is a responsibility to evaluate and make sure that that person is not failing to live by those truths.

If Moses came down and beat and killed his slaves and did a bunch of other heinous things in violation of this law, the people of Israel couldn't very well take that as from God, could they? Well, should we follow your example or your words? They don't match. Which is it? Did God say some of us can beat our slaves and others can't or some of us can sell our daughters to foreigners and others can't or what is the deal? The communicator has a responsibility to have a consistent witness. This is why you have the qualifications for elder and the qualifications for deacon in Timothy and Titus.

It's not my favorite thing to have to talk about, but it is a true thing that we all need to know. Whatever part of the country you may end up in or whatever church you go to, you have a responsibility before the Lord to find someone who will bring the message from the mountain complete and live a life that is consistent with it. And if there is a discrepancy or if there is an anomaly there, that should be a topic for serious consideration because it has to match.

And that's what this verse 21.1 is here for. God tells Moses, you shall set these truths before them. If he fails, then he's not the man for that job.

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years. And in the seventh, he shall go out free and pay nothing. Well, if you buy a Hebrew servant, this brings up the whole topic of slavery and I'm going to give you more or less what in the old days we would have called the doctrine of slavery.

I would actually classify it as a principle. The principles regarding slavery in Old Testament days. These are lifestyle civil laws for Israel that convey and teach a moral component.

But by way of introduction, you can think of this for yourself. There are two different kinds of slaves in Israel. They are either fellow Israelites or they are foreigners.

They are either circumcised or uncircumcised when you start out acquiring them as a slave. They are either part of the tribes of Israel or they are from the nations. And the law makes a distinction between them.

There is a different standard of treatment for those who are from Israel and those who are not. What is the application for us? We have a different standard. I know this sounds sort of politically incorrect, but there is a different standard of treatment and a different standard of evaluation between Christians and when you're dealing with those in the outside world.

Those are either not of the faith or who are such invisible Christians that they look like they're not in the faith. There are those who are within a fellowship and we know something of their walk with the Lord and there are people who we have no knowledge of any spiritual dynamic. And there is a different standard.

There are those to whom we will express charity. There are those for whom we will put ourselves out at great lengths and there are others we will not. And it is biblical stewardship of time.

It is biblical stewardship of resources to make that distinction. Someone within our local fellowship is going to get a different standard of treatment and support and even charity, if you will, than someone who's standing on the corner with a cardboard sign. We make evaluations based on who's in and who's out.

You find this throughout the New Testament. You don't hear it taught much, but it is true. And when you know that someone is a fellow member of the body of Christ, you have a much greater responsibility for all of the fruit of the Spirit.

Long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, self-control, especially endurance, especially forbearing and bearing up under and forgiveness. Peter didn't ask, how many times should I forgive the Roman centurion that comes and ransacks my house? He said, how many times should I forgive my brother? And Jesus didn't say, forgive the Romans for ransacking your house 77 times. He said, forgive your brother as many times as it takes.

So as we look at that landscape of our lives that we mentioned earlier, one of the ways that we sort out our priorities and the value that we assign to an opportunity is, am I operating in the household of faith or am I dealing with someone outside? And it's very helpful because you know how far you need to go. When it's in the household of faith, there's pretty much no limit. When it's outside the household of faith, He asks you to go one mile, go two.

It doesn't say go five and it doesn't say go ten. We are to reflect Christ, but there is a distinction and there's a distinction within Israel in the treatment of slaves. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up in verse 2 and 3 and iron out why God seems to sanction slavery among His own people. It doesn't sound like something that would fly, but it's here and so that's what we'll look at when we come back.