

Exod 04-02-01a

Day of February 2004, to worship the Lord through our fellowship, through our singing, through our study of the Word of God. We approach at this point the renewed study in the book of Exodus, where we pick up in chapter 21 this morning. And as we do, let's take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer.

It gives us an opportunity to reset, to reboot if necessary, to be sure that we are susceptible to the ministry of God's Spirit and ready to take advantage of this time and this opportunity. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for giving us another day and another opportunity to be nourished up in the truth of your Word. We thank you for the environment that you provide for us, our safety, our security, our relatively good health and situation in which we can pause in the onward rush of our lives to refresh ourselves at the oasis of your Word.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who died to rescue us from a lost and truly hopeless condition. We thank you that you have provided not only our salvation but also strength for each day, guidance, encouragement, and a calling and a hope, a purpose for our lives. We have a defined mission.

We have a period of time in which to accomplish it, and we know that then we will be united with the Lord Jesus and move into the next phase of your plan in human history. We pray for those who are overseas who are furthering our national interests, both there and here at home. We pray that you will guide those who are in positions to make decisions that affect our nation.

We pray for President Bush and for all of those leaders in our judiciary, in our Congress, especially those who are partakers in the Lord Jesus and are brethren in the faith. We ask now that you'll bless us as we study your Word. Help us to rightly divide it, to remember it, and apply it in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For our script reading this morning, turn with me to Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, the 39th book in the Bible.

The name means My Messenger in Hebrew. We are studying in Exodus the giving of the law from God to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. This is occupying the latter half, really, of the book of Exodus.

If you think of the outline of the book, we basically see it fall into three parts. We have Israel in Egypt in the first twelve and a half chapters. Then we have Israel in the wilderness for another six chapters.

And then we have Israel at Mount Sinai, which is going to take us from chapter 19 through the end of the book. So, bondage and slavery in Egypt, deliverance and travel through the wilderness to get to the place of God's presence, and then the message that is delivered in

God's presence. And this is really significant for our progress as believers.

We start out in unbelief. We start out in a lost and hopeless condition. Slaves to sin, without hope, without God in the world.

God put His plan in motion before we were saved. We see His dealings with Moses and in bringing the Deliverer at the right place at the right time. And His mighty, righteous, right hand delivering His people.

And the details of what Christ accomplished on our behalf as pictured in the Passover lamb. And the deliverance from the armies of Pharaoh across the Red Sea. Baptism into the plan and purpose of God.

And then the wanderings between Egypt and Sinai, indicating God's ability to provide and protect and preserve. Pictured in these six chapters from about chapter 13, verse 16 up to the end of chapter 18, we saw that traverse. And now they're in the presence of God where God speaks.

God makes His will known. Now, if you're an Israelite and you're delivered from Egypt, taken across the Red Sea, brought out into the wilderness, here's the manna, here's the water from the rock, here is the daily sustenance. You say, okay, I've been delivered, I've been renewed, I've been commissioned, I've been provided for, now what do I do? How do I serve the God that delivered me? And this is why they have come to the presence of God at Mount Sinai.

Well, God's presence is symbolized by the mountain and by the smoke. Moses actually goes up and hears His voice and is in the presence of His glory. And so for these next 20 chapters or so, we're getting the mission.

This is the calling. This is the function. This is the definition of the nation of Israel and the people who dwell therein.

This is how they operate. Toward God, toward each other, toward outsiders. It's all defined.

This is what they get when they come to the place of the presence of God. This is what you and I should come away with when we worship, when we assemble, when we study God's Word. We should come away with a clear idea of who we are and why we're here, what our purpose is.

When you go to the book of James, he talks about being a doer of the Word and not a hearer only, and he compares it to a mirror. He says there are people who look in the mirror, they see the arrangement of their features in their clothing and their general overall appearance, and then they walk away and forget what they saw. If you go to a retail store where they sell shoes and other kinds of clothing, if you try it on, what do you do? You come out and you ask your husband, How do I look? You stand in front of the mirror and see how you look.

And you get feedback on whether or not it fits. Does this make me look fat, that kind of thing?

Does this look too old for me? Is this too young for me? That's a real judgment call. How do you answer that question? Is this too young for me or does this make me look fat? There's hardly a right answer to that question.

It doesn't make you look fat. It's also in the way you say it. It doesn't make you look fat.

You have to be careful. But the Word of God is a looking glass for our souls. It should reflect and show us where we need rearrangement, where we need improvement.

God is giving His Word to the people of Israel at Sinai. Before we get lost in the details of these commandments and the different categories and the different punishments and conditions and all of that, what are we doing here? Why is Israel at Sinai? God is giving them the mirror. He's giving them the looking glass into which they should gaze and find themselves, see themselves, know how to live, how to act, how to operate as a nation.

That's the big picture. Well, I want to jump forward a number of centuries from 1440 B.C. to about 800 years later where we have the Book of Malachi. Israel has now had the Law of God for centuries.

They have come into the land of promise that God vowed to bring them and give them. How have they done? What is the measure? Well, take a look here in our script reading this morning at Malachi, beginning in chapter 1, verse 6. A son honors his father and a servant honors his master. We just saw this in the Decalogue in the Ten Commandments, didn't we? Honor your father and mother that your days may be long.

We saw the laws here in chapter 20 regarding slaves, treatment of slaves. Slaves should honor their masters. Masters should respect their slaves.

If then, God says, I am the father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my reverence? Says the Lord of hosts, to you priests who despise my name. Yet you say, in what way have we despised your name? Now, isn't this the classic human response? You get an accusation and you say, what? Who? Me? Who says? What makes you think I've done this? In what way have we despised your name? God says in verse 7, you offered defiled food on my altar, but say, in what way have we defiled you? You do it and you don't admit it. You just redefine your terms.

This is not defiled. This is fine. The table of the Lord has become contemptible.

When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? The sacrificial animals were to be the best of the flock. But people rationalized and they justified and they said, well, God certainly doesn't want me to have a poor herd. And next year, if I keep the best and interbreed them, well, I'll have a better sacrifice.

But this year, I've got this three-legged cow. I've got this one with a white eye. I'll sacrifice that one.

God will understand. It's just rationalization, redefinition. And God says it's corrupted.

It's defiled. It has made the table of the Lord contemptible. Offer it then to your governor.

Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably, says the Lord of Hosts? You wouldn't even do this to each other. You wouldn't go down to the magistrate. You wouldn't go down to the guy you're trying to impress and give him a one-eyed, three-legged cow.

But you're bringing it to the Lord. Verse 9. But now, entreat God's favor that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably? If you disrespect the Lord, is He going to treat you favorably? If you give Him second or third place, if you give Him second or third best, can you really expect His favor, says the Lord of Hosts? Who is there even among you who would shut the doors so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of Hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles. In every place, incense shall be offered to My name and a pure offering. For My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts.

And this is a prophecy. This is a harbinger. This is a foreshadowing of the fact that because Israel has not taken advantage of this opportunity, the Israelites have not availed themselves of the chance to honor God, God is going to give that opportunity to others, to the Gentiles, to the nations, the ones the Israelites look down on and despise.

You profane it in that you say the table of the Lord is defiled and its fruit and its food is contemptible. You also say, oh, what a weariness, and you sneer at it. Its too much trouble.

Its too much work. You know, the common sermon that gets preached on Sundays is people don't come to church, they say, oh, that church is messed up, the people in it aren't friendly, they're hypocrites. You know, a lot of people, if you talk to them, they say, the reason I don't go to church is I tried going to church for a while, but the people down there are all hypocrites.

And, oh, the pastor, he's constantly preaching hellfire and brimstone, and he's trotting me down. I want to be lifted up. I want to be boosted.

I don't want to be trampled and made to feel guilty. Its just a big guilt trip down there. And this kind of thing.

People find fault with the worship and the worship service or the people who come to worship. And that's sort of what's pictured here. They say, oh, that table of the Lord, that whole worship of the Lord, that's all defiled anyway.

That's messed up. You think of the days of Eli and his sons abusing the sacrifices. And they say, I'm not even going to go.

It's just all messed up. Or you say, it's a weariness. It's just, you know, that's my one day to rest and recharge my batteries.

You want me to go down there and get bored to tears, sit with a bunch of hypocrites, and listen to music I don't like, et cetera, et cetera. Finding fault with the form, finding fault, it's just, it's too much trouble. It's a weariness.

It's too hard, they say. And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick. Thus, you bring an offering.

You're busy pointing fingers at everybody else, making the offering and the worship contemptible, and yet look what you bring. You bring the lame and the blind and the contemptible offering yourself, and yet you're busy. Remember, we talked a bit this the other night how people tend to project their own sinful heart onto others.

We judge others by ourselves. We say, well, I recognize what you're doing. I see the way you're acting, and I know from the inside what I would be doing if I were in your shoes.

You see this in politics quite often. Someone will call for a measure or call for a law or call for steps to be taken, and people say, you're just doing that for politics. You're just doing that for your own interest.

And you get the idea that if these people were in that position, that's exactly what they would be doing. So they're imputing to the president or to a candidate or whatever. They're imputing to them what they themselves know they would be doing in that position.

Well, here you have someone imputing their own contemptible, corruptible behavior onto the people trying to worship, and they themselves are doing the very same thing. God says, should I accept this from your hand? Should I accept your apathy? Should I accept your excuses that there's no point in worshiping because others aren't doing it right? It's no excuse for the worshiper himself, is it? It doesn't matter what anyone else is doing. It only matters about each one of us, how we approach God, what we bring to God.

Verse 14, Cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is to be feared, revered among the nations. If God's own people don't reverence His name, how can you expect the nations to see His glory? The very argument that they are making, the very excuse they're giving themselves, God says, this is how the nations are going to view the God of Israel.

Well, His own people bring Him blind sacrifices. Why should we respect Him? God says, I am a great king. I deserve reverence beyond any king on this earth.

You would never take your own governor, the kind of sacrifice you offer to the Lord. Chapter 2, Now, O priest, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear and if you will not take it to

heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts.

Notice, by the way, how often, how frequently this text is punctuated with the phrase, saith the Lord, says the Lord. In case someone thinks that Malachi is on a soapbox and is sort of taking it upon himself to preach his own sermon on this topic, God says, this is not the prophet taking liberties. This is what I say.

This is what God says. And over and over again, you have this punctuation. You have it here again in verse 2. If you will not hear, if you will not take it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.

Isn't it an awful thing when your very blessings become a curse? Financial prosperity can become a curse. Popularity can become a curse. Being well known and in a circle of people can become a curse.

Your family, which ought to be a blessing, can become a curse. Your job, which ought to be a blessing, can become a curse. The blessings that God brings in all of the different areas, whether it's professional or personal or in the area of relationship or whatever it may be, those blessings can turn to ashes in our mouth when we disrespect the Lord.

How can we expect Him to bless us when we disrespect Him? Yes, I have cursed them already because you do not take it to heart. Notice, what is the way to avoid this very unhappy consequence? He doesn't say, because you are not working hard enough or because you're not bearing enough fruit. He says, you're just not taking it to heart.

If you would just take it to heart, this would not happen. But you do not take it to heart. You don't listen.

You don't respond. You don't think it's important. You don't assign it a priority.

You don't make it a goal. You don't weigh it as having value. Behold, God says, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces.

It's a little more graphic in Hebrew, but this will do. I will spread refuse in your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts, and one will take you away with it. Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord of hosts.

Remember, He started this out by saying, O priests, this is addressed to the priests, the ones who are supposed to be in a position of spiritual leadership. Who is in spiritual leadership in our context? And don't say me. We are our own spiritual leadership.

We are our own priests. We don't have intermediaries. We don't go down and find a guy with a backward collar.

We are our own priests. We are our own offerers. This is why Romans 12 encourages us to present ourselves a living sacrifice.

It doesn't say, take yourself to the priest and let him offer you as a sacrifice. The Lord Jesus Christ is our high priest. A topic which, by the way, we'll mention a little bit later.

That my covenant with Levi may continue. There are responsibilities that go with being a priest, but there are also privileges. The priests partook of the sacrifice.

The priests were closest to the presence of God. And from those to whom much is given, much is required. We have great privileges and opportunities, but we also have great responsibilities.

God has a covenant with us in terms of priesthood, and we don't want that to be annulled. Verse 5, My covenant was with him one of life and peace. Is there anything that people look for and strive for more than life and peace? That's a promise attached to our priesthood if we exercise it than if we don't abuse it.

The whole function of blind and lame sacrifices even if someone brought one, the priest should never have offered it. The priest should have stopped that. Well, we have to stop ourselves.

My covenant was with him one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear me, so that he feared me and was reverent before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity.

For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth. The New Testament parallel to this, speak the truth to one another in love. It's a function of our priesthood, our ministry, our ambassadorship to speak the truth and have the law on our lips.

He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way. You have caused many to stumble at the law.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore, I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept my ways, but have shown partiality in the law. Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? He begins here with corruption in dealing with God.

Now he's turning to corruption in dealing with one another. And aren't these the two tables of the law? Isn't this what we're studying in Exodus? Reverence for God, love and respect for one another. Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem.

For Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution, which he loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign God. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.

You can't be duplicitous. You can't be hypocritical. You can't claim to love God, to know God, to

worship God, and to learn of God, and then turn around and practice a lifestyle of travesty, of deceit, of disobedience.

This second thing you do, you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying, so that he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. What does this mean? You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, weeping and crying. Oh Lord, please, make things better.

Some things do not come by prayer, do they? Some things do not come by prayer. If you listen to a lot of modern Christian teaching, they're constantly quoting, asking it shall be given. Whatever you ask in my name, my Father will do for you.

And yet, when you read the Word of God, there are things that do not come by request. They come through obedience. They come by being qualified.

You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, weeping and crying, so that he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, for what reason? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously. She is your companion, your wife by covenant.

What's the idea here? There is no more symbolic or representative picture in the horizontal plane, dealing with one another, than the covenant between husband and wife. And it is used to represent all dealings in the horizontal plane. How can you say you love God? How can you come before God and make requests of Him when you deal deceitfully, when you deal unfaithfully, when you deal in a loveless manner with those around? And this is not just restricted to marriage.

This is family, this is co-workers, this is people in the neighborhood, this is anyone with whom we come in contact. You cannot expect God to bless. In fact, you can expect God to curse if you disrespect Him and if you disrespect others.

That's what's being pictured here. So this is the consequence. This great delivery at Sinai of the law, these great tables that we are studying, there is a lot of importance attached to what the people of Israel are going to do with this message, with this code of conduct, with these guidelines, with these laws, commandments, mishpatim, judgments.

There is no more important thing that I can say to you than heed the Word of God. Be not hearers only. We are commanded, we are exhorted, we are demanded by the Lord to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

So we're in the hearing section here at Sinai. But all you have to do is turn to Malachi, turn to the last book of the Old Testament to see what the consequences are. And we haven't even begun.

If you read the rest of Malachi, you can see the rest of God's grievances with Israel. What did

they do with what they received? And we can ask ourselves the same question. What do we do with what we receive? Well, let's turn back now because I want to move a little bit forward in Exodus chapter 21.

We saw last time the... In fact, let me just back up a little and look at an outline here. I mentioned the broad outline of the book, Israel and Egypt, the first twelve and a half chapters, Israel in the wilderness, the next six chapters or so, and then 19 through 40, Israel at Mount Sinai. And we have several things that break down here.

In this last half of the book, beginning in chapter 19, we have the presence of God. This is the first time that God has come down and spoken His will for the nation of Israel. They've seen the pillar of fire.

They've seen the pillar of cloud. It has given them geographical guidance. They go when it goes.

They stop when it stops. But now they're getting moral and spiritual guidance. We have... Let me give you an outline here.

I don't normally give you a lot of things to write, but I think to keep some sort of a grip on where we're going here, let me give you an outline. This is my own outline of what we're covering in these next three chapters, chapter 20 through chapter 23. After the Decalogue, after the fear of the people and the approach of Moses, we begin.

And I think the chapter 21 should really have begun at chapter 20, verse 22, because this is the first of 12 sections of this covenant code that God delivers. So, section 1 begins in chapter 20, verse 22 through 26. And this was the instructions regarding altars.

So, number 1, altars. Chapter 20, verse 22 through 26. There's going to be 12 of these, by the way.

Number 1 is altars. Number 2 is servants. Servants.

Chapter 21, verses 1 through 11. Chapter 3, or the third section, I should say, where we're going to pick up this morning, is capital offenses, specifically dealing with violence. This is capital offenses for violence.

The fourth section is going to be physical injury. And there are two subsections of that. Physical injury that is active, that you cause by malice aforethought or that you take action, you raise your hand.

That's chapter 21, verses 12 through 27. The capital offenses for violence are 21, 12 through 17. And then physical injury in the active sense is verses 18 through 27 of that same chapter, 21.

Then God is going to give instructions for physical injury that is passive. This is sort of like liability. You're liable even though you didn't directly cause it.

Passive or liability. And this is chapter 21, verses 28 through 36. That's the first four, and that'll do us for now.

I'll give you another eight a little bit down the road. We've already talked about the altars, about not going up by steps. We've talked about the servants, how those should be treated, and that included the laws of purchased wives.

And so we pick up now this morning in chapter 21, verse 12, capital offenses. These are death penalty issues. Exodus chapter 21, verse 12.

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from my altar that he may die.

He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death. And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Now this is some pretty strong instruction, isn't it? Let's begin at the beginning here. He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. And then this is qualified, because you could apply this to battle, you could apply it to justice and so on, to self-defense.

However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. This is murder versus homicide. You know, the C.I.D.E. has to do with killing.

You have patricide, fratricide, homicide, infanticide, all different kinds of killing. And that Latin root there, the C.I.D.E., just has the idea of killing. Homo is for like, what are we? Homo sapiens.

H-O-M-O has the idea of man or H-O-M-I. So this is killing a man. But murder is distinguished from homicide in that there is premeditation.

There is malice aforethought. You provide yourself ahead of times with motive and means, and then you find your opportunity and you kill someone. You have an issue.

You have a reason why you want them dead. And you think about it beforehand and carry it out. If it is a homicide in some other way, this would be accidental death, it is still penalized, but not with the death penalty.

Instead, God says, I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. This is talking about the cities of refuge. God is going to appoint 48 cities in the land, 48 cities of the Levites.

Each of these cities will have a priest, have a place where the man can go and make his case and say it wasn't a murder. And if the priest approves it, then he can remain in that city and he is immune. The family avenger of blood cannot kill him so long as he remains in the city of

refuge.

And he will stay in the city of refuge until either he dies or the high priest dies. Why would this be? And then once the high priest dies, all the people in the city of refuge can return to their land and to their clan and to their homes and so on. Why would this be contingent upon the death of the high priest? He bears a guilt, even though it was accidental, even though it was not premeditated.

I only meant to punch him. I didn't know I would break his nose and drive the bone into his brain and kill him. I was just careless in tying my cart to the ox.

I didn't know that it would come loose and run over the man or kill the child or whatever it might be. The family, of course, is incredibly angry at me, but I didn't mean to kill the man. It was an accident.

He goes to the city of refuge. The priest says, OK, you can stay. He stays until the death of the high priest.

High priest dies. He can return. Why the death of the high priest? Because who is the great high priest? Who is this foreshadowing? It's the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in the offer of himself as a sacrifice for sin, he takes away guilt. Whether it is a sin of commission, a sin of omission, whether it was an intentional or an unintentional sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, through his death, removes our guilt. One aspect of that work is reflected in the city of refuge.

The blood guilt, which is real, is held in abeyance. It's put on hold until the high priest dies. He is allowed to live, but he is under a restriction.

He is held within the city of refuge. In a way, you can picture the nation of Israel as a giant city of refuge in which the people of God dwell until the death of Israel's great high priest, with a capital H and a capital P. You can live in the restrictions of the law, live in the restrictions of the nation of Israel, and not be slain for your unintentional sin. We are born in sin.

We are unintentionally sinful from our conception and from our birth. God does not obliterate every new baby that is born because it's sinful. He allows us to live.

And this is pictured in Israel. The Israelites themselves are under blood guilt and will be until the Lord Jesus comes. And so that city of refuge and death of the high priest picture is what is being spoken of here.

A point for you, a place where he may flee. These are the unintentional sins. And remember that these pictures often only address one aspect.

It's not a complete picture. You say, well, what about the guiltiness of someone who intentionally murders? He will surely be put to death. If a man acts with premeditation against

his neighbor to kill him by treachery, take him from my altar that he may die.

What's he doing at the altar? He's pleading for his life. He has gone to the city of refuge and taken hold of the altar and said, it's not my fault. You say, yes, it is.

You slew this guy, premeditated its murder. You are found guilty. And you are taken outside and stoned.

He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. This is a specific type of striking. It doesn't say kill.

It says strike. Violence done to the parents was punishable by death, whether or not the parents died. Any sort of assault, assault on one's parents was a death penalty offense.

Cursing, this is verbal assault, whether it was a physical assault or a verbal assault, was a death penalty offense in Israel. God takes that very seriously. Honor your father and mother is graven into the stone tables of the law.

And disrespecting parents is disrespecting God. It is at the same level as murder. And you think, really? I mean, that seems awfully severe.

Look at your Bible. This is what God says. Disrespect for the authority that God has set up, and there is no more primal authority than the authority of parents over children.

To disrespect it, either physically or verbally, is a death penalty offense in Israel. They didn't have a lot of teenage shenanigans in Israel because those who did so left. Left life.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll analyze these death penalty offenses and then move forward into the consequences of physical injury, the liability for either active or passive acts of violence. But if there's one thing to keep in mind as we look at all of these, it is God takes our response seriously.

These have been preserved and brought down to us for our instruction. Think about Malachi. To decide that this is all for Israel and refuse to look at it to light the way for our own life is to bring ourselves under a curse.

That's just what the Word of God says, so we want to be paying close attention. Let's pause here and take our break.