

Exod 04-02-29a

Welcome. This is Sunday morning, the 29th of February, 2004. Don't get to give that date out very often.

But we continue our study of the book of Exodus in chapter 23. The Word of God is living and powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword.

It pierces even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow. It is a critic or a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart. All scripture is God-breathed.

It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may become mature, complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I like the content of that particular verse when it says what the Word of God is profitable for. We've mentioned before that when it says doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that's one of the tiniest chiasms in the Bible, because doctrine and instruction in righteousness tells us what we should do.

And that's the bracket inside the reproof and correction tells us what we should not do. I can't think of any more helpful information than that that tells me what I should do and what I should not do. That's what the Word of God does for us.

People have different ideas of what should and should not be done. One group of people think it's wonderful to go down to the steps of the courthouse in San Francisco and watch homosexuals marry each other. Other people don't think that should be done.

So there's a big question. What is it that should and should not be done? What is the standard? Who gets to decide what's right and what's wrong? There was a day in Israel where one of the last notices in that interim between the book of Judges and the beginning of 1 Samuel, it says every man did what was right in his own eyes. And we have a lot of that going on today.

What is the problem with this? What's the matter with everybody doing what's right in their own eyes? They used to have a thing, if it feels good, do it. Debbie Boone, it can't be wrong if it feels so right. Who gets to choose what's right and what's wrong? And why do we accept some other standard than our own? Why do we not decide that we know best what is right and what is wrong for us? Well, there is this concept called consequence, outcome, ultimate result.

And the problem with us trying to figure out what is right and what is wrong in a vacuum is that we are unaware and we cannot properly calculate result and outcome. For this reason, many people do things that in the short term seem to be very gratifying, but in the long run end in destruction. The scripture tells us there is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.

Everybody in favor of the ways of death, raise your hand. Everybody that wants to go down the

way of death. This is my choice.

I want to go down the way of death. Well, if you understand death, if you know what death entails, it's not the road we want to go down. So, we do not have the ability in and of ourselves.

We don't have a good moral compass. The Word of God tells us from the beginning our compass got corrupted. Our direction finder is broken.

We are conceived in iniquity. We are born in sin. We are fallen.

Now, have you ever seen someone who was a real bad person to be around? Someone who is just mean? Someone who is unpleasant? There is a whole collection of words that we apply to people like this. We say that person is really bad news. Why would anybody want to be around them? Why would anybody want to spend time with them? They are obnoxious.

Well, put yourself in the position of the obnoxious person. Do they think they are obnoxious? Do they realize the hate and discontent that they stir up? You look at someone who does really foolish things, maybe in their conversation they just rattle on endlessly and never stop. Or, they are just a downer.

In the 70's they would have called it a bummer to be around them. They just bring everybody down. All they can do is think of negative things.

There is a black cloud over their head. Well, it is easy for us to look at that and say, let's stay away. There are people we just don't want to be around because they are negative.

It is a bad experience to be with them. Well, put yourself in the position of that person. How many of those people know how obnoxious they are, or how negative they are, or how self-centered they are? Most of them don't.

It is kind of like there is a blindness, right? You say, can't that person see that people avoid them? Well, now think about you and me. We have that same kind of blindness when it comes to what is right and what is wrong. We are the obnoxious guy.

We are the self-centered person. We are the endless talker. We are the person everyone wants to avoid.

Sometimes little old people, you know, they start going senile and they tell you the same story 4, 5, 6, 7 times. Everybody ever been around someone like that? They don't know and you don't have the heart to tell them, well, Grandma, this is the 6th go around on that track. I mean, you know, I played like I didn't hear the story before the first 5 times, but this is number 6 and it is really kind of wearing thin.

But she doesn't know. She can't comprehend. It doesn't register with her.

Well, this is the kind of blindness. Do you see the comparison? This is the kind of blindness that

we have when we look and we try to judge what is right and what is wrong. We can't see it.

It seems right to us, but it is going to result in death. That is what Scripture tells us. That is why God gave the law at Mount Sinai to Israel.

That is why we are studying this book of Exodus. God came down and said, look, you people are halt and lame and blind when it comes to righteousness, when it comes to moral truth. I am going to give you an absolute standard.

I am going to tell you what is right. I am going to tell you what is wrong. I am going to give you instruction in righteousness.

I am going to give you doctrine. These are the things you should do. I am also going to give you reproof and correction, the things that you should not do.

And I am going to tell you, God says, I am going to tell you the result. I am going to tell you what will happen if you follow instruction in righteousness or if you follow the wrong road. So we have this information.

So now there is a different problem. We don't have to figure out, is this right or is this wrong? Should I do this or should I not? And what will be the outcome if I do this thing or if I don't do this thing? We don't have to figure that out. God has revealed it to us.

Our problem now is, what are we going to do with the information? How many years now has the Surgeon General warning been printed on cigarettes? I don't even remember. It's 25, 30 years, something like that. They started doing it, I think, back maybe when I was in high school or earlier.

Surgeon General, who is the Surgeon General? He is the top doctor in the country, right? He is the doctor of doctors. He does it for the whole nation. He says, if you smoke these things, you are going to get cancer.

You are going to get heart disease. And we are warning you about it because not only is it personally damaging to you, but it drags down the whole country. Because when you get sick and your medical costs overrun your insurance, everybody pays.

Insurance rates go up. The health care system is brought down. There are too many people getting sick.

It drags down the nation. The Surgeon General doesn't personally care about me. Why does he warn me about smoking? Because it's bad for the country.

And he is in charge of medical things for the country. So, we look at this, and by the way, I'm not picking on anybody. I know more people than I can count on my one hand who are listening to the sound of my voice who smoke.

So don't take this personally. It's just my favorite example. But the warning is there.

The facts are there. The medical evidence is there. But everybody that buys a pack of cigarettes has that warning, and yet they bought them because they intend to fire them up.

Cigars, cigarettes, Tipperillos used to be the commercial when I was a lad. And people smoke them. They smoke pipe tobacco.

People chew. They chew tobacco. Troy Aikman had a horrible addiction to chewing tobacco.

And I saw a guy in the Marine Corps get cancer of the lip from chewing that stuff. Because it's a carcinogen, and wherever you put it, put it in your lungs, it's going to make cancer. Put it in your lip, it's going to make cancer.

It's just a matter of time. So, the warning is there. The prediction of what will happen if you make a habit out of this is there.

But what's the problem? People disregard the warning. I will take my chances. I don't see it happening today.

Tomorrow will take care of itself, right? Well, everybody gets to make up their own mind in these areas when it comes to daily life. But when it comes to the Word of God, when God tells us what is right and tells us what is wrong, and says, live by this or you're on the road to death. We say, but now, wait a minute.

I'm not on the road to death. I'm saved. I have accepted Christ as my Savior.

I know that the Lord Jesus Christ looked down and saw me in my lost and hopeless condition. I am corrupt. I commit sins all the time.

God looks at me and says, there's only one destination for you, and that is the eternal lake of fire. But, he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who took my penalty, who died in my place. That's what this Passion movie portrays, is that critical moment when Jesus bears the sins of the world in his own body on the tree.

That is a surrogate. People that can't have children, ladies that can't have children, what do they do? They get an egg, and they get a sperm, and they get a gamete, and an embryo, and some other lady has it implanted in her womb. She carries it to term.

There's ladies that have had their own mother carry their baby for them, because of the physiological compatibility. And the grandmother, what is the kid going to say when he writes a card on Mother's Day? Well, let's see, grandma, mother, but it's a surrogate. The woman carries the child in the place of the one who cannot do it.

The Lord Jesus Christ was our replacement, our substitute on the cross. The death, people that watch that movie, hopefully remember that that could have been and should have been us, in

terms of penalty. In actuality, the Lord Jesus Christ paid that penalty, and paid it for everyone.

He is the propitiation of our sins, John says, and not of ours only, but also for the sins of the entire world. Everybody's sins were carried by Christ on the cross. So, how do we opt in and accept that substitute? We just say the word.

We go to God the Father and say, God, thank you for sending your Son to die in my place. I know that I am disqualified, unqualified from getting anywhere near you, but you sent your Son, He died for me, and through Him I can be clean. I can be delivered.

I can be made acceptable. And that's what I want. I choose it.

I accept the gift. When you do that, you're eternally united with the Lord Jesus Christ. You're eternally acceptable in the sight of the Father, because when He looks at us, He doesn't see us in our corruption.

He sees His Son, and He sees the acceptable sacrifice. So, once we do that, we have new information available to us. God tells us what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is not, and He tells us the consequence.

There is a consequence for disregarding the Lord Jesus Christ. And it doesn't mean that you have to go bear your own sins. Jesus already bore the sins.

If you reject His work on the cross, you don't assume the penalty again. You get something different. It is an eternity in the lake of fire.

What Jesus went through on the cross was horrible, but it is not the same as an eternity in the lake of fire. People do not go to hell for their sins. They go to hell for rejecting the incredibly gracious work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

So there is a consequence. Somebody can say, well, you know, it seems right to me that that's basically kind of a Jewish myth. I think there was kind of a rabbi that wandered around 2,000 years ago.

This religion kind of grew up around him, but he's not really the Son of God. He didn't really die on the cross for people's sins. This whole Bible thing is just a collection of Jewish fables.

It's good for them, but I just don't need it. I think people use it as a crutch. I've seen a lot of Christians, and they're a bunch of hypocrites, and I don't want to join that club, so it's not for me.

People say, this is what seems right to me. This Christianity stuff, I don't want to have to give up all of my fun. I have a good time doing things that the Bible frowns on, and if I got into this Christianity thing, my life would be over.

It would just be boring. I'd have to sit around quoting verses all day or something. Of course,

the problem with that view is, for the millions upon millions of people who have accepted Christ and who do try to live in the light of the Word of God, if you look at them, they're not miserable.

They're not bored. Christianity wouldn't last very long if people tried it, and it was just a stiff, boring Amish festival, where you just kind of sit around in a starched collar and wait for somebody to sing a psalm or something. That is a caricature, but it seems right to people.

People look at Christianity, they caricature it, they find worst examples, and then they say, that's not for me. You can caricature anything and say, that's not for me. But our judgment is faulty.

We can't see. We don't think very well. So we try to accept what God gives us in lieu of that.

And that's what we have here in the book of Exodus. So with that as our introduction, turn with me now to Exodus chapter 23, second book of the Bible. In our outline, we have seen that this section has 12 parts.

It began in chapter 20. We've reviewed this many times. We are about to come to the end.

We're going to see the end of it, the conclusion of it, this morning. We have 12 parts. We saw that it keeps changing perspective.

It looks up at God. It looks down at those who are underprivileged, who are servants, who are the poor. It looks to the side at peers.

Now, who are you dealing with? Think about the people that you have relations with right now, that you have dealings with, that you see and talk to and see and talk to you. They are either in a position of authority, they are peers, or they are in some sort of subjection or submission or should be. Right? Well, in terms of dealing with people, how much more information do you need? God says, here's how to deal with people above you.

Here's how to deal with people below you. Here's how to deal with people that are in your horizontal periphery. And here's how to deal with God.

Here's how to stay straight with the Lord God in heaven. That's pretty much all of the relationship information that we need. Well, we have seen that over the course of the last chapter and a half.

We saw last time in chapter 23, the first nine verses, the tenth section of this. Section 1 was altars, worship of God. Section 2 was servants, those beneath.

Section 3 was capital offenses for violence, murder and the like. Section 4 was physical injury, whether you actively cause it or you are responsible for it by negligence. Section 5 was property, whether it's theft, damage, something left in safe deposit, or something that is borrowed.

Property. Section 5. Section 6 had to do with seduction. Tearing the fabric of society by wrongly having relations with someone's daughter or tolerating a sorceress who is drawing people away from God, a different kind of seduction.

The seventh section in 2218-20 dealt with paganism. What do you do with people who call you to worship some other God? Section 8 dealt, and that was capital offenses by the way, it is a death penalty offense to draw people away from God. The ninth section, or the eighth rather, was affliction of the poor.

2221-27. The ninth section, reverence and dedication. 2228-31.

Now, in chapter 23, we have the tenth section, truth and justice. We looked at this last time. And this dealt with treating people based on what is right, not on what you feel.

We tend to love our friends and hate our enemies, right? Somebody's my enemy, why should I do him any favors? If there's a big rainstorm like there is this morning, and I see them out in the parking lot with the hood raised because their battery is dead, they left their lights on last night, and they need a set of jumper cables on the battery to get them going, I'm going to drive right on by and just roll down my window and laugh out loud as I pass. That serves you right, you dirty bird. That's what you get for being such an obnoxious person.

This is what seemeth right to us. God says, no. Let me tell you what's right.

You treat people on the basis of their need, not on the basis of their personality or their character. And even if your enemy has an ox or a donkey that is going astray, you run out there and catch it for him. Do him a good turn.

Don't throw rocks at it and hope it will go really far away and he'll never find it. We can sum up this principle in a very simple statement. Do not build your happiness on someone else's unhappiness.

If you find yourself gratified at the misfortune of someone else, God says this is wrong. The Word of God judges the thought and intent of the heart and says it's wrong. How long do you think someone is going to remain an enemy if people in the community are constantly doing them a good turn, are returning good for their evil? It's going to heap coals of fire on their head.

It's just going to make them miserable. They won't be able to take it. They're going to develop a sense of obligation.

They're going to develop a sense of remorse and guilt, hopefully, unless they're just completely calloused over and their conscience is seared with a hot iron. The old country saying goes, you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. Of course, I'm asking, why do I want to catch a fly? But the idea is, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those that spitefully use you.

Now, everybody that has this as an instinctive, natural part of their constitution, there aren't any. None of us are disposed this way. We want to stick it in and twist the blade.

We want to inflict pain where we have received pain. This is what gratifies us. But it's a short-term view.

It seems right. It's not. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would refrain from helping it, God knows us pretty well, doesn't He? You shall surely help.

Put aside your emotion. Put aside your corrupt reaction and do what is right for right's sake. Do what's right because it's right.

God tells us what's right. We have instruction in righteousness. Do not pervert the judgment of your poor in His dispute.

Don't twist justice for the poor. This is the argument, by the way, that is used to justify a lot of malfunctions in our society. Why is there such a hue and cry to let the perverts marry one another and be declared married and have the rights and privileges of marital status? The argument is they are persecuted.

They are deprived by virtue of this status. And so feel sorry for them. It's a civil rights issue is the argument.

The Bible says don't use being downtrodden as an argument. Something is either right or it's not. Don't say, well, we should do this because these people have lost a privilege.

They don't get a status. They don't get a tax break. They are put upon for this.

That is not the issue. You can't grant a right or a status because the person is deprived, because they're shortchanged somehow. They feel like second-class citizens.

That's beside the point. I don't care if they're shortchanged or not. The Word of God says look at the action.

Is the union of a man and a man or a woman and a woman a marriage? The Bible says no. Go to Genesis. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.

Monogamous man-woman marriage. So do not pervert justice of the poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter.

And this is sometimes difficult. You can be part of a group that gets engaged in a false matter. And if you do not participate, it rats out the group.

It betrays the group. I saw a lady on one of the news programs who was a whistleblower on Wall Street because there was fraudulent securities trading going on. And they were playing

with the securities and the stocks and things that are a part of people's retirement programs.

They're supposed to be, what do you call it? You have a, yeah, they are special programs where you go in mutual funds. That's what I'm trying to think of. It's a mutual fund.

Well, mutual funds, the way those work, and I'm not a big finance guy as you can tell, but these are kind of a block, and they're supposed to be treated in a certain way. Well, these guys were taking and buying and selling them on the short. They'd go up a little, and they'd sell them.

They'd go down a little, and they'd buy them and keep all the money, which short-changes all the people that are participating in this mutual fund because you're not supposed to trade those individually. They're a block, and everybody should get the benefit when they're bought and sold. But these guys were getting the little bits and pieces and playing with them.

Well, this went on for years, years, billions with a B. Billions of dollars were siphoned out of mutual funds that most middle-class Americans have some sort of a stake in. These are a part of portfolios. They're a part of retirement plans, 401Ks, 403Bs, all the rest of it.

These were a part of it, and these people were siphoning off the cream and deflating the value of these funds. Well, it went on for years, but everybody that knew about it was benefiting from it, and so nobody squealed. Nobody told.

Nobody brought it up to the SEC. Well, this lady got promoted up in, and she looked at it, and she said, Ooh, this is not right. The SEC wouldn't do anything, so she contacted the guy in New York.

There is a local guy in New York who has authority, because the stock exchange is in New York, to do things under state law that the feds just sit on their hands and whistle Dixie. So this guy is the bane of fraud in the New York Stock Exchange, and he's a local. He's a New York guy.

He's not a fed. So the lady went to him and said, Hey, this is what's going on, and he blew the thing wide open, and now there's guys in handcuffs, and all kinds of stuff is coming out. But keep yourself far from a false matter.

When you see something going on that's false, you've got to get disassociated from it. This is what I liked about the honor concept at Annapolis versus the honor code at West Point. You're required at West Point, in every case, to expose whatever lying, cheating, or stealing you have seen.

At Annapolis, you have the option. You have to figure out what is better. Should I just distance myself from this and let it come to its own conclusion, or is it something that is endangering life, property? Is this serious enough that it needs to be brought to the attention of the authorities? I think it's a much more realistic and real-world policy.

Keep yourself far from a false matter. Do not kill those who are both innocent and righteous.

This basically says if you engage in a false matter, you may think it's a small thing, it's just a fraud.

People go to the store, they go to Walmart or Target, they buy something, they wear it to a party, and then they take it back the next day for a refund. You might know somebody that does that. Or they have something and it breaks, and they'll go to the store, find a new one, open the package, and switch the broken one and the new one, hang the package back up, and sneak out.

There are people who do this kind of thing. It's a false matter. You think, well, what's the harm? I was down there looking at bicycle supplies at Albertsons, and there is an esoteric little tool.

There's probably not one person in 50 that uses it, but if you have a bicycle and you want to work on the chain, there is a link in the chain that is the take-apart link. Well, there's a little tool for taking apart the link and putting it back together. It's a little vice, funny-looking thing.

It's like a \$5 deal. I was down there at Albertsons. Somebody had ripped the package open, taken the thing out, and hung the empty package back up.

It's a false matter, but people say, five bucks, who cares? The Bible says when you get engaged in a false matter, you are ultimately killing the innocent and the righteous. It adds up. It accrues.

It is the ways of death. We think, no, it's a small thing. It's in the gray area.

The Bible says, no. Keep yourself far from a false matter. Do not kill the innocent and the righteous.

These are in parallel. These are tied together. God says, I will not justify the wicked.

You may be saved, but you will be defiled. You will be disqualified from blessing. You will be disqualified.

God will do warning discipline, intensive discipline, and ultimate discipline. There are three phases that you can discern, many different parts of the Word of God. Warning discipline is verbal.

You see this in the history of Israel. God sent the prophets. What did the prophets do? Did they get out a cat-of-nine-tails and start lashing the people and whipping them and saying, shame on you for worshipping Baal and worshipping Ashtar and so on? They spoke.

They said, God sees. God knows. God's glory is going to depart.

You're going to lose what He has given you. That was the warning discipline. Did not heed the warning discipline, so then intensive discipline.

God gave them economic disaster. God gave them oppression by their enemies. There was fear.

There was plunder. There was savaging and ravaging going on, especially in the outskirts of Israel. People did not respond.

They didn't repent. They didn't take away the high places and the worship of idols. Finally, God sent in the Assyrians and took away the ten northern tribes.

The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were chasing for time, but then they got disinterested in the things of God. Ultimately, you have the Babylonians coming in and sacking Jerusalem and taking many captive. I will not justify the wicked.

Take no bribe. A bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. Now, we think of bribery as somebody coming in and shaking hands and there's a \$20 bill folded up there and you're supposed to say something different than you would have said otherwise.

But what is a bribe? A bribe is accepting something in return for doing the wrong thing. I get a benefit if I overlook what's right. Take no bribe.

A bribe blinds the discerning. You can be discerning. You can be someone who is on the road, who is learning the Word of God and growing, and yet, if you compromise righteousness and say, well, but you see there's a benefit here if I just kind of turn a blind eye to this principle or this action or this thing I should refrain from.

If I just rationalize this, I really get a benefit and I really like that benefit. You will lose your ability to discern. It will blind your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

It will blind your sensitivity to the Word of God. And the next thing you know, you are on the high-speed dark rail through the wide gate that goes to destruction. Also, you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

This is an interesting verse, verse 9, because most of these commandments, as I mentioned a chapter or two ago, are in the singular. You, Y-O-U, is singular. You shall not oppress a stranger.

But it switches to the plural, because you all were strangers in the lands of Egypt. You are a part of a group that was delivered. And the emphasis here is, you should not oppress, because you belong to a group that has been delivered from oppression.

And what you do affects others. What you do is a part of a fabric. Even though something seems right to us, it can not only be death for us, but it puts a rotten spot in the fabric.

And it will affect and impact others. Now, what is the conclusion that we draw from this section and how far we have gotten? We started out talking about the fact that God communicates this standard that we lack, this missing piece in our soul that our conscience does not inform us of,

which is rebuke, correction, instruction in righteousness. The doctrine of what is right, correction for what is wrong.

That is what He is giving to Israel here. And these are representative, they are symbolic of how we treat one another. So, what? So what? Every one of us, I suspect, is going to engage in conversation sometime today.

We are either going to be talking to someone above us, beside us, or below us. Will any of this scripture affect the way we treat each other? The policy that we adopt toward each other? Well, it should, because this is what is right. Go the extra mile.

Turn the other cheek. Return good for evil. All of us are capable.

We have the means, the motive, and the opportunity to do ill to each other. We get short-tempered. We get impatient.

We get self-centered. We are inconsiderate. We are neglectful.

We just get busy and fail to think. And we wrong each other. These regulations are almost entirely, the ones that don't deal with relationship with God, are all about relationships with people.

And what does it tell us? It's just like the hymn we sang at the outset this morning. If you keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus, the things of this world will sink into a proper perspective. Is it really necessary to win a verbal battle? Is it really necessary to score a point? Is it really necessary to put this person in their place or make them pay in some way because they've done something wrong? It's not.

We choose every day which standard of right and wrong we're going to use. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up in verse 10. We're going to enter a new and final area here. This is Sabbaths and Feasts.

It's the last part of what God delivers to Israel from Mount Sinai on this occasion. And we're going to see the significance of the three great feasts in Israel and the meaning of the Sabbath. That's what we'll look at when we come back.