

Exod 04-08-22b

We pick up our study this morning in Exodus chapter 32 via Psalm 103 which really encapsulates a lot of the principles in really all three of our studies but especially our Exodus study. This Psalm of David is a stern talking to as it were with his own soul and he reminds his soul of the importance of focusing on God. All of what we have seen in these first eight verses is a reflection on God and his pattern both of justice and righteousness and of mercy and forgiveness and we really choose which side of God's character we come down on.

It is all dependent upon our choice. The Lord in verse eight is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He is going to tell Moses this in an upcoming scene in our study on Mount Sinai between the giving of the first and the second sets of tablets.

This very principle is going to be expressed. The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, abounding in mercy, dispensing his mercy to thousands of those who love him but he by no means clears the guilty. He will not always strive nor will he keep forever.

This is an interesting verse. I wish I had time to really go through it in Hebrew. For now we will just accept the English translation.

He will not always and just leave out the italicized words. He will not always strive nor will he keep forever. And you see the italicized words it does not say with us.

It says God will not always strive and anyone who has been a parent knows that we wrestle within ourselves about what to do about our children. We go one way or another and the word here is reave. Reave is the word that is used for a court case.

Over in the prophets God will tell Israel I have a dispute with you. I have a court case. I have a prosecution for you.

And this says God will not reave forever. It is not going to be a contested case where the issue is in doubt and it can go one way or the other. God is going to decide the fate.

He's not going to leave the court case open where well we can prosecute for a while, we can defend for a while, maybe it'll go this way, maybe it'll go that way. This tells us that like the door slamming on the ark there is a point of decision. There is a point of no return.

You can't sit the fence forever. How long can Herod keep John the Baptist in prison? How long can the nation of Israel look at the Lord Jesus Christ and sit the fence? Not long. How long can Felix keep the Apostle Paul and go with Drusilla to hear him talk? Not long.

God does not leave the issue undecided for long. That's what this says. It really has nothing to do with striving in the sense of like God is in a wrestling match with us like the quote-unquote angel with Jacob.

That's not what's being said here. God is not going to leave the thing undecided forever. It's going to be decided one way or the other.

We have to pitch in our decision. We have to show our true colors because God is going to decide the case and if we don't start showing faith, if we don't start showing choice, God's going to decide the case against us and it's going to be the righteousness. It's going to be the justice.

It's going to be the judgment that is going to come. The opportunity for clemency, the opportunity for leniency, the opportunity for deliverance is of limited duration. That's what this phrase says.

You have a limited time of opportunity to avail yourself of verse 8. That's why verse 9 follows verse 8. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness, but God is no fool. He's not an old softy. You can't just keep coming back and receiving clemency forever.

God is going to decide the reeve. He's going to decide the case. So if you want to avail yourself of the loving kindness, behold, now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of salvation. Nor will he keep forever. And this is Yitor in Hebrew, which is from Natar.

I could go into the details of why it has a Yod instead of a Nun at the beginning, but Natar is to watch over or guard and it is often used in the sense of being slow to anger. It says God is slow to anger in verse 8, but He's not going to be slow to anger forever. He's going to decide the case and if it comes down on the anger side, then the slow to anger part goes away.

I mean, you can have a watch pot never boils. It can be slow to boil, but it will come to a boil. And the fact that it was slow is no longer an issue when it is boiling, right? Now that the pot is boiling, if you get dropped into boiling oil, and there were people who did back in the day.

If you ever read Fox's Book of Martyrs, what a hair-raising thing that is. If you haven't read it, you ought to at least sample it sometime. If even a tenth of what's in there is true, my heavens, be thankful you're a Christian in this day and age and not back in those days, where for the slightest infraction, a God-fearing man... I remember one passage, I read it when I was in high school.

There was a man who was walking down a road on a Sunday and somebody overheard him utter what they thought was a blasphemy. The man was impaled. You know what impaled means? It means you sharpen a post like a fence post and you skewer the guy on it and then you leave him there.

You run it through him, through his middle, and then the post is in the ground and you just leave him until he dies. Because the guy was thought to have... Somebody overheard him and

reported him to the authorities as a blasphemer for saying, God help us or something on the Sabbath. The thing is just full of hair-raising things.

To be slow to anger doesn't mean that anger is a bad thing. It just means anger is never going to come. And it says he will not be slow to anger forever.

He will not always consider the case. He's going to render a verdict and he's not going to be slow to anger and abounding in mercy forever. If you don't qualify for the mercy, if you don't opt in for the mercy, if you don't choose the mercy, you're going to get the judgment and it is going to come and there is no appeal.

There is no going back and saying, well remember yesterday you said I could do this. That deal's off. You said yesterday that you might forgive me and give me another shot.

That's off. The ark door has slammed shut and you cannot get in. You're done.

It's over. You will be knocking at the door saying, Lord, Lord, and he's going to say, I don't know you. Depart from me.

You're out there with the blasphemers. Verse 10, He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our name. Who is the plural here? Who's David talking to? This is the plural of me, myself and I, right? He has not dealt with us according to our sins.

Now of course this applies. This is sort of a corporate psalm. David is saying, I'm giving you this psalm because this is true of all of us, but it's also the man who slept with Bathsheba, the man who murdered Uriah, the man who numbered the people, the man who fled to the Philistines and let the spit run down his beard, the man who has had failure after failure after failure of great magnitude, of national import.

God has not dealt with us according to our sins. What's the penalty for murder under the law? Premeditated murder. What's the penalty? Death.

How come David did not die? He killed a man, did he not? God says he did. He says he did. Two witnesses agree he murdered Uriah.

How come he's not dead? The king above the law? He has not dealt with us according to our sins. He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities. David's name is forever uniquely attached to the Son of God.

Jesus is the Son of God and he is the Son of David. That is an honor unparalleled in human history. David was not dealt with according to his iniquities, was he? Why? Because when God opened the door of mercy, when God was still considering the case, David came in and prostrated himself before the throne and said, Against thee and thee only have I sinned.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear

him, his mercy.

How high are the heavens above the earth? Well, what's the nearest star? How many light years? Was it two and a half light years away, the nearest star? Four light years away? If you were going to stack up mercy to get to the nearest point in the heavens, just to the moon. How far is that? They talk about the national debt. If you stacked up dollar bills you could get a stack beyond the moon just in our national debt.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him. It is incalculably large, but where is the period in that sentence? As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy, period. Is that what it says? That mercy has a condition, doesn't it? To those who fear him.

This is not fear in the sense of abject phobia, this is acknowledgment, reverence. Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name.

That's fear of the Lord. Proverbs, Solomon the son of David says, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Anybody that's ever looked at a globe, how far is the east from the west? I can tell you how far the north is from the south, 12,500 miles, right? North pole, south pole, half the circumference of the earth, give or take. How far is the east from the west? Do we have an east pole? Do we have a west pole? We don't. If you say, well, I'm here and I'm going to go east until I find the west.

Well, it could be going infinitely, right? That's how far he has removed our transgressions from us. He has not punished us according to our iniquities, he has not dealt with us according to our sins, instead he has removed them an infinite distance away. Notice, they are not gone, they are removed.

He doesn't say he has disappeared them, he has removed them an infinite distance away. Where did they go? On to the bleeding body of the Savior on the cross. They are not gone, they are not destroyed, they are removed from us an infinite distance away.

That's how far he has removed them from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities who? As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities his children. Is that what it says? He pities the children who fear him.

There is a category of children who are not pitied, right? Being a child does not automatically guarantee mercy, favorable concern. What is pity, by the way? This is not, oh, you're so pitiful. I pity you.

Mr. T., I pity the poor fool. It's not that kind of pity. Pity is favorable consideration.

I look at you with favorable consideration. You're disadvantaged, I'll favorably consider helping you in some fashion. As a father pities his children, the Lord pities those who fear him.

Why? He knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. He made us, he knows all about us. He was not taken by surprise, he wasn't shocked and dismayed that the Israelites built the golden calf.

He knew it was coming, he saw it before he ever delivered them out of Egypt, didn't he? And he delivered them anyway. God knew that we would fail, he knew that we would have problems, and he saved us anyway. He's talking to us today anyway, because he knows.

Is it an excuse? Is it a license to sin, a license to fail, a license to go our own way? No. But God is not taken by surprise. He knows we're made out of dirt.

Man has days like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. The wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. First chapter of Ecclesiastes.

Remember that? It comes and it goes. Where is the profit? Where is the long-term value? Where is the substance? Man, and the pity of man, and the favor of man, and the adulation of man, popularity, fame, the wind passes over it and it is gone. You think about these Olympic championships, you think about presidential elections, you have to look it up in a book somewhere, don't you? Find an almanac.

Who won the gold medal in any given sport in 1940 or 1944? I don't know, you have to go look it up. Probably find it on the web somewhere. Who was Calvin Coolidge's running mate? I have no earthly idea.

Who was the vice president under Taft? I have no earthly idea. The guy was world famous, nationally known, voted for beyond anybody else. Nobody even knows his name today, and he was the vice president of the United States.

You can look it up somewhere, but it vanishes, it fades. Favorable considerations, you think of friends of that guy, thought they were really in for big things. Cronyism was big in the latter part of the 19th century.

Andrew Jackson, his administration was rife with it. His name was blackened by all of the corruption and graft and stuff that went on during his time, back in the early 1800s. The mercy of the Lord, on the other hand, is from everlasting to everlasting.

If you had a choice between having favorable consideration and having a good name and a good word and some advantage with some guy you know today or with the God of the universe and his good offices are going to last eternally, it's a no brainer which one to choose, right? The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on whom? For the third time we are told it is those who fear Him. The Lord pities those who fear Him. His mercy is great toward those who fear Him.

His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him. His righteousness, the key to blessing, the key to substance, the key to benefit, the whole book of Romans, 16 chapters on nothing but how do you get righteousness? How do you get that thing that you cannot lose? How do you claim Christ's righteousness for yourself in an eternal way? God's righteousness goes not just to us but to our children and our children's children. To such as keep His covenant to those who remember His commandments to do them.

Fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If we fear the Lord, we keep His commandments. Jesus said the one who has my words and keeps them, he's the one that loves me.

Keeping the covenant, remembering the commandments to do them. Those are the ones who receive not only benefit themselves but are a benefit to others. There is what we call, I used to put it in my notes, BBA.

BBA is a wonderful thing, blessing by association. Sometimes you're in someone's periphery, you're in someone's locus or sphere of influence and it just seems that good things happen. It's like in the secular world they say good luck just rubs off on you.

Chim Chimney you know the song, you get next to a chimney sweep, shake hands with the sweep and good luck just rubs off on you. That's the mystical idea there. It is a fact that there is blessing by association with those who fear the Lord.

When you are in their periphery, if you're married to them, if you're a child of them, if you are in their family, if you are a friend of theirs, if they are a co-worker, if you are around a growing healthy believer, there is blessing that exudes beyond them into their sphere and you pick it up. There are a lot of people who don't know how bad off they are because they are in the bursting radius of a righteous faithful believer. God's mercy goes to those who keep his covenant and children and children's children.

This is secondary and tertiary areas of influence. Granddad was a corking great believer and I am still getting the benefit is the idea here. But it's not just familial ties.

Remember David is talking to his soul and those who are in the periphery, those who are related in a sense benefit. To such as keep his covenant, those who remember his commandments to do them. Not just remember them to think about them, not just remember them to say, boy I didn't get that one done, but to do them.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, his kingdom rules over all. Let's remember what counts. Is it the petty ups and downs of this life or is it the eternal kingdom? Then David makes an appeal in that eternal kingdom.

He says, not just my soul ought to bless the Lord, but he looks up and he says, the angels are watching. Bless the Lord, you his angels who excel in strength, who do his word, heeding the voice of his word. Not all angels do that, do they? There is a third of the angels that don't bless the Lord, who don't excel in strength, who don't do his word, who don't heed the voice of his

word.

Historically have not, went in a different direction. Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, you ministers of his, who do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion.

This is not inanimate objects here. All three of these are references to the angelic creation. God's works in the places of his dominion, in all three of these it includes angels and it transitions in verse 22 to humanity.

The angels are higher than us, we are made a little lower than the angels, but if the powerful heed God's word and do his will, if the hosts who are servant angels, ministers of his, bless the Lord and do his word, and you work your way down to man, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him? All God's works in all places of his dominion ought to bless the Lord. It's the point of the pyramid, isn't it? You have the vast angelic hosts, you have the ministering angels, you have all the places of his dominion and you get right down, bless the Lord, my soul. I am part of a fabric.

I am one point of light in a vast eternal kingdom. Everybody who knows anything about that eternal kingdom is blessing the Lord and keeping his word to do it, and it all boils down to me. What am I going to do? This is the perspective.

You notice that David has painted for himself the perspective of God in his kingdom, surrounded by his ministering angels, and he says, so what should my soul be doing? This is not one of the Psalms where David says, look at my enemies and my foes gnashing with their teeth and nipping at my heels. What is he doing? He's saying, look at my soul. My soul is a part of a vast confederation of God's kingdom and I should be consistent with that.

That's what I ought to be looking at. It gives a different frame of reference and a different context, doesn't it? Our problems and our concerns shrink into insignificance when you think about these vast domains. When you think about the mercy of the Lord and his compassion, and he remembers, he knows that we're made of mud.

Merle Travis, when he's 16 tons, some people say a man is made out of mud, a poor man is made out of muscle and blood, muscle and blood and skin and bones. Mind is weak and a back is strong. What do you get for your work? That's a great song if you think about the words.

It's kind of an Ecclesiastes song. If you owe your soul to the company store, you're totally caught up in this world, aren't you? The unspoken question in that song is, what is your life worth when you're in debt and all you can do is try to keep your nose above water in the material world? David says, look at the Lord. Bless the Lord, oh my soul.

Remember his compassion and his mercy. Remember the greatest problem in the universe has been solved. He has separated our iniquities from us.

He has not given us what we deserve. If you fear him, mercy is available, but you've got to claim

it while the case is underway. Because if he decides the case and you haven't claimed his mercy, you're done.

That's this psalm in a nutshell. Now go back to Exodus chapter 32. This is a great background, I think, for what happens at the end of this chapter.

Once Moses comes down from the mountain, the people have gone completely the opposite way. Aaron in verse 22, oh Moses, don't get hot under the collar here. Don't let your anger run away with you there, bro.

You know the people are set on evil. They said to me, make us gods that shall go before us. Moses, we don't know what happened to him.

And I said, if you've got some gold, break it off. Toss the pieces in here. They gave it to me.

I threw it in the fire and this calf came out. This is something I did not point out last time. I mean it's comical to hear Aaron say, well this calf just came walking out.

But you get the idea. Aaron is making a play here that maybe Moses will see this as an act of God. If he can convince Moses that the calf just walked out of the fire, potentially Moses could say, so you say the calf just came out of the fire.

Well, I remember the staff turning to a snake and the leprosy, stick your hand in, it's leprosy, stick it in again and it comes out. It was kind of a miracle. Maybe this was God.

This tells you something about Aaron's thinking that he says, I threw the gold in the fire, the calf walked out. It's sort of a play. He's leaving room open for Moses to ameliorate his anger and say, well, maybe we can allow this as an expression of God, as a reputation of the God that brought us out of Egypt because it's sort of a miracle.

Of course, no such thing. It's a false statement. No such miracle occurred.

No calf walked out of the flame. And oddly enough, you have two different castings into the fire, don't you? Aaron casts the gold into the fire and according to him, the calf walks out. Moses casts the gold into the fire and the calf disappears.

You get Moses casting the gold into the fire, and the calf goes away. Aaron says, well, you know, as it went, so it came. You throw the gold in, the calf goes away, I throw the gold in, out comes the calf.

You just kind of dignify this with a response. It doesn't say, and behold, Moses did grab a sword and hew Aaron in pieces. He doesn't even... But look at verse 25.

Now when Moses saw the people were unrestrained, for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies. This is a strong link to our psalm. What is it that Moses sees? He doesn't say, if you listen to Cecil B. DeMille in the Ten Commandments, he just rambles

about the people and their lewdness and their lust.

He's like Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon. He makes up a bunch of King James English to really talk about how lewd and horrible the people were, and he shows all these scenes of wild dancing and all this. You get the idea that he would have loved to do more if it hadn't been a ratings board.

But he says, behold, they did do this and they did do that and they did do the other and they were all this awful. Moses is not shocked by the lewdness of the people and sitting down to eat and rising up to play. What is it that prompts Moses in verse 25? Moses saw that the people were, and it translates it here, unrestrained.

This verb actually has the idea of being released, set loose. It's used of Pharaoh letting the people go from bondage in Egypt. When Moses saw that the people were unconstrained, Aaron did not constrain them.

What was the constraint that they broke loose from? What was the bond that they shattered? The covenant, the sprinkling, the commitment that they had made to God. What is the legitimate grounds for divorce biblically? Someone makes a promise to you, you make a promise to them, you take a vow, you make a covenant. Jesus said in his day, it is not permitted to divorce except in the case of fornication and fornication in the truest and ultimate sense is the breaking loose from that vow.

You ruin the trust and the commitment that is a part of that covenant. You destroy it. You eviscerate it and it does not have to be a physical act.

There are lots of ways of breaking that vow and the person who is the injured party has to make a decision. Can I do what the apostle Paul says and continue on unequally yoked with someone who has broken this? God is going to do it here with the nation of Israel, but on different terms, in a different way. But Jesus said you have a choice if you are the injured party and someone becomes unconstrained by their vow.

It is not just a matter of bending it. It is not a matter of a slip. They feel no constraint.

This is the attitude toward marriage in a lot of our culture today. Well, it is a convenience. It works out great for taxes, but I do not really feel constrained.

It is just words I said on a particular Saturday afternoon, but if I feel differently a couple of weeks from now when I see somebody I like, I do not feel any constraint. I do not feel any bond. I do not feel any sort of commitment.

I release myself from that. This is what Moses sees. The covenant, the sprinkling of blood, the meal with the elders on the side of the mountain with the Lord God enthroned in the midst of the glassy sea means nothing to these people.

They are unconstrained. They are uncommitted. They have no attitude such as you find in Psalm 103.

Just the opposite. When Moses saw the people were unconstrained, Aaron had not constrained them. And what is the result? They are shamed in the sight of their enemies.

What is the goal of this being constrained? What is the goal of keeping the commitment? Ultimately, it is not even their own benefit. It is God's reputation before His enemies, before those who oppose Him, before those who resist Him, before those who are antagonistic to the things of God. God is making a point among the nations.

The Israelites have shamed themselves and shamed their covenant before those who are onlookers. What is our purpose in this life? We are an object lesson not only to ourselves but to the rest of God's sentient creation. We are an exhibit.

We are exhibit A in the appeal case that the angels are making. Why can't we just live apart from you? And God says, I am going to show you people who live connected to me and I am going to show you people who live disconnected from me. I am going to show you what happens when people are unconstrained.

And I am going to show you what happens when people are constrained. So if we are marked out and if we choose and say, I am going to be the constrained crowd. I am going to be the covenant crowd.

I am going to be the one who says, bless the Lord, oh my soul. And then we renege and fracture that bond. Oh, I wasn't really serious about that.

Where are the faithful? God says, David writes another psalm where he says, the Lord is searching the earth to find someone who will fear him. To find someone who will be his exhibit A of what it means to live a life of faith and obedience to God. And if you say, this happens with software.

You know they have beta testers. Somebody writes a program and they say, look, I need you to run this software for me. I'll give you a free copy of the finished product if you'll help me work the bugs out of this.

If you'll demonstrate it, if you'll operate it and help us perfect it, then you'll get a free copy. And so people say, okay, fine. Give me the program.

And then they don't fulfill their testing. They don't do their hours. They don't send in their bug reports.

They don't fulfill their end of the bargain. And yet when the finished product finally does come out that was perfected with the help of people who were faithful, well, they still want their free copy. And the manufacturer says, look, I asked you to do 40 hours of testing.

I asked you to send me bug reports. I got nothing from you. And you're still wanting your free copy.

You opted in, but you fractured your bond. You violated your covenant. And you're still wanting your free copy because you were quote a beta tester when you're really not.

Well, this in a crude way is an illustration of what God is looking for from us. He says, look, I want to demonstrate to all of my creation the difference. What is the difference between life with God and life without God? Do you think God has enough examples of failures? Do you think God has enough examples of those who care nothing about Him? I think probably so.

I think history is full of them. I think our current world population is full of them. How many people do you think are on the narrow road going through the straight gate? How valuable do you think God considers those who actually do value Him? How much do you think God is going to honor someone who honors Him? This is a temporary situation.

And yet if we honor God in this short life where we grow up like the grass and wither like the flower, we have to be faithful for a short time. God's blessing on us is eternal. The benefits are unto the ages.

And we, it's like the disciples going to the garden with the Lord. Could you not watch with me for one hour? Could you not be faithful for that one hour? Could you not trust me for that one brief moment of life on earth so that I could give you eternal benefit? Moses saw that the people were unconstrained. What they had said to God, what God had said to them, didn't matter enough for them to last 40 days, the period of testing at the foot of the mountain.

It just didn't matter enough for it to make a difference. That's the question that faces us each and every day. Does our relationship with God, does God's mercy that is renewed every morning, all of the things we saw in Psalm 103, does it matter enough to change the way we live or not? If not, we are no help in the case.

We are a shame. We bring disrepute. We are an enemy of the cross because we claim the title.

We talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk. Why, what's the first thing unbelievers say when they hear the gospel? These Christians are a bunch of hypocrites. Christians are a bunch of nutcases.

These Christians, who'd want to join that club? And whose fault is that? God's or ours? That's our fault because we claim the title. We want the free software, but we don't want to do anything about it. Aaron had not restrained them to their shame among their enemies.

What is the one place where God's presence exists? What is the one source of light to the world in this day, 1440 B.C.? It's Israel. And Israel has just profaned themselves, dancing around an idol like any rank, bald-headed Egyptian down south. They've done the very same thing.

Now where is God's glory going to go? The biggest problem with this is it completely negates God's purpose for the nation. Their purpose is ruined. So this is why Moses is going to stand at the entrance of the camp.

This is why 3,000 men are going to be killed by their fellow Israelites on this occasion. Look at this. Moses stood at the entrance of the camp and said, whoever is on the Lord's side, to me.

Cross out the word come in your New King James. To me. If you're on the Lord's side, to me.

Where is he standing? At the entrance of the camp. At the gate of the camp. Come to me at the gate.

The sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. He said to them, thus says the Lord God of Israel, let every man put his sword on his side. Go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp.

Notice the gateway is the issue here. Moses stands at the gateway. They are going to go from door to door.

From gate to gate. Because Moses has issued the call. If you're on the Lord's side, where are you now? Are you at your own gateway or are you with Moses? There is a call.

Who is on the Lord's side? To me, Moses says. Everybody who is willing to stand up and say, I'm on the Lord's side, which is the better part of the Levites, has come to Moses. Everybody else says, you burnt down our calf, you spoiled sport.

You threw a wet blanket on our party. Why don't you stay on the mountain and glow in the dark up there and leave us alone? We were having a good time. You're messing with our party.

You're messing with our purpose. We agreed. We outvote you.

We know more than you do. We were all in agreement. We were all happy.

We were having a grand old time. You came down, you big stick in the mud, and you brought down the mood. You're the buzz kill.

We're going to stand in our gateways. Who is on the Lord's side? They have come. Moses says, alright.

The wreath has been decided. The time for mercy and clemency is over. You either came or you didn't.

Now, if you're standing there defiantly in your doorway, you die. Let every man put his sword on his side. Go in and out from entrance to entrance, throughout the camp.

Let every man kill his brother. Let every man kill his companion. Let every man kill his neighbor.

Why does he say brother, companion, and neighbor? Because filial bonds, normal bonds of loyalty are off the table in this time of judgment. God is our Heavenly Father, but if we reach the time of judgment without claiming His grace, the filial bond is off the table. It doesn't matter.

Turn with me. Keep your finger here, but turn real quick to Deuteronomy 33. Deuteronomy 33.8. Do you remember the situation here? This is sort of like the swan song of Jacob, but this is the blessing which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel with before his death.

He gets down to verse 8 and he's going to talk about the tribe of Levi. What does he say? Of Levi, he said, Let your Thummim and your Urim be with your sanctified one. The high priest in Israel comes from the tribe of Levi.

He wears the breastplate that contains the Urim and Thummim. Whom you tested at Massah and with whom you contended at the waters of Meribah, who says of his father and mother, I have not seen them, nor did he acknowledge his brothers or know his own children. For they have observed your word and kept your covenant.

They shall teach Jacob your judgments and Israel your law. They shall put incense before you and a whole burnt sacrifice on your altar. Bless his substance, Lord, and accept the work of his hands.

Strike the loins of those who rise against him and of those who hate him, that they rise not again. What is the principle of blessing for Levi here? He is no respecter of persons. Could be your own father and mother, could be your own brothers, could be your own children.

The most important thing is observing the word of God. The Levites on this occasion slay those who are close to them. How hard is that? It's terribly hard.

But what do the people who are on the Lord's side say? It is the word of God above all. If it costs me a relationship, so be it. Father and mother, I haven't seen them.

Brothers, I don't acknowledge. Children, I don't know them. In the time of judgment, those filial bonds are surpassed by the righteousness and the justice of God.

Filial bonds are a basis for compassion and mercy and leniency and being slow to anger. But there comes a time when that's off the table. This is that time.

This is an illustration of that time. And three thousand of them die. In our last verse, verse 29, after the Levites do according to the word of Moses, three thousand men of the people fall that day, Moses said in verse 29, consecrate yourselves today to the Lord so that he may bestow on you a blessing because every man has opposed his son and his brother.

That word consecrate there, literally, it's a phrase in Hebrew. Fill your hands. Fill your hands.

The word yad is there for hand and the verb parah which means to fill. You know what it's talking about? Over and over again. We've seen it earlier in Exodus.

Consecrate the priests. Consecrate the sons of Aaron. It literally says fill your hands.

What are your hands filled with? The sacrifice. The Levites have been commissioned to be the priests in Israel. You know what their first sacrifice is? Their own brothers.

Their own sons. The opposers in Israel. The first blood sacrifice offered by the Levites are the people.

It's a powerful lesson because it says first and foremost, if you're going to be dedicated to God, God has to be more important than father or mother or sister or brother or son or daughter. He has to be first. Bless the Lord, O my soul, all that is within me.

Bless his holy name. Fear the Lord. Keep his commandments to do them.

Everything hinges on that attitude to the exclusion of all else. Claim his mercy while he is here because the time of judgment will come. Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.