

**Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church**  
**Reading Together**  
**The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus**

**February 20 – Exodus 19: 3 – 8 and 20: 1 – 2**

As you read today's reading, you might get the impression that getting in good with God is all about what we do. After all, look at verse 5, "if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth." That sure sounds like conditional love on God's part. If you do this then you will be my people. If that is true, then do you realize what that means for your life? You are only as good as your last performance. If you are good, you are in, and if you are bad you are out. Unfortunately, that is how most people view Christianity. But think about what is really happening here. Don't just look at verse 5, look at verse 4. Look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 20. The obedience that God is calling Israel to is based on what God has already done for them. God brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery. He has carried on eagle's wings through the wilderness. He has loved them before they have done a thing for Him. Isn't that the Gospel?

**Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Before we do anything, God sets His love, His affection upon us.

**1 John 3:1** See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Israel was made God's chosen possession, not because of what they had done or would do, but simply because God chose to lavish His love upon them. The same is true for us. You are not saved and given eternal life, because of what you do, or who you are. You are saved because for reasons all His own, God chose to love you, and through the blood of Christ, to adopt you and bring you into His family, as His child. Now, because you are part of the family, God calls you to obedience, just as He calls Israel to obedience here in chapter 19 and 20. But it is to be an obedience based on gratitude for what God has already done for them.

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Through His outstretched hand and mighty arm, God has redeemed Israel out of slavery and made them His own, now He is calling them to live out what He has made them to be—His prized possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In the New Testament, Peter uses this exact same language to describe who we are in Jesus.

**1 Peter 2: 9 – 10** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Notice Peter doesn't say we are trying to become this; he says we already are these things, and notice why. It is all because we have received God's mercy.

**February 21 – Exodus 19: 9 – 25 and Exodus 20: 18 – 21**

As you read today's reading, you see the problem with God. Well actually, it is not the problem with God it is the problem with us. It is a problem that we often times overlook and minimize, because we lose sight of two things. First, God's holiness, and second, our sinfulness. Because of these two things, we cannot approach God. Do you see what God does here? As God comes down to meet with Moses at the top of Mt. Sinai, He orders Moses to erect a barrier at the base of Mt. Sinai. Why? Do you remember back to Exodus 3 and the account there of Moses and the burning bush? God told Moses to take off his sandals, because the ground around the bush had become holy ground. What made the ground holy? The presence of the Lord. The same thing is happening here at Mt. Sinai. Even though we often lose sight of it, as sinful people we cannot be in the presence of God. We cannot be, because God will not allow His holiness to be tainted with our sinfulness, and we also cannot simply because we cannot stand to be in the presence of a Holy God. It would literally be our undoing.

**Isaiah 6: 1 – 5** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the

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temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

As long as we can compare ourselves to other sinful beings we can feel okay about ourselves, or maybe even really good about ourselves, but the moment we step anywhere near the presence of God, we see the truth about ourselves. We see how tainted we are by sin. We see how even our good works are as filthy rags in God’s presence (Isaiah 64: 6). How can we approach a holy God when even our best works seem to be nothing more than filthy rags?

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 24:

**Psalm 24: 3 – 4** Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

We may want to flatter ourselves and think that we are that person, that we have clean hands and a pure heart, but listen to how Paul describes each of us:

**Romans 3: 10 – 23** “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” ..... There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Just like Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we cannot approach a holy God in our own righteousness, because we have none. But there is one who came who had clean hands a pure heart—Jesus, the Son of God. There is one who could ascend the mountain of the Lord, the one who ascended Mt. Calvary—Jesus, the Son of Man.

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**2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Through Christ's righteousness we are made righteous, through Christ's righteousness, we can ascend the mountain of Lord and live in the presence of a holy God.

**February 22 – Exodus 20: 3 – 21**

God's law is a wonderful thing. Think what a mess our world would be if we didn't have it. Think what it would be like to live in a world where murder was perfectly permissible, or stealing, or even lying. God gave us the law to make the world we live in a better place to live. Even the fourth commandment (remember the Sabbath and keep it holy), that we seem to struggle with so much, is there for our good. If nothing else, we need a day to rest and recharge our batteries. The law is good but we make it into a bad thing when we try to earn our righteousness through our own flawed obedience to it. Don't get me wrong, we should do our best to obey God's law, but we must never fall into the trap of thinking that somehow we can be righteous in God's sight, through our efforts to obey it. Think what happens to us if we allow the law to become our righteousness. We will either become puffed up with pride that we can keep it better than others, or we will become inconsolably depressed at our failure to keep it as well as others do. The law brings order to our society, and it tells us how God wants us to live our lives, but the real purpose of the law is to show us how much we need Jesus.

***Galatians 3:24*** *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*

The New Living Translation does a good job of explaining just what Paul is trying to teach us about the law.

***Galatians 3:24*** *Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God.*

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The law teaches us what true righteousness is, but even more than that it teaches us how much we need a savior. Jesus is that savior. He took on flesh, he was born under the law, just so that we could be saved from our own failure to keep the law.

**Galatians 4:4-5** *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

**February 23 – Matthew 22: 34 – 40**

Jesus' answer to those who are questioning him about the law is brilliant. Rather than placing one of God's laws above another, Jesus captures the sum of the whole law in two concise statements that sum the 10 commandments up in their entirety. The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God, and Jesus summed these up by saying that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all that we have and all that we are. Stop and think about it this way, if we are loving God with everything that we are, then there will be no other Gods before him, we won't misuse his name, we won't manufacture other gods to compete with him, and we probably will want to spend more than just one day a week with him. But in his explanation of what the greatest commandment was, Jesus didn't stop with just that. Jesus went on to say, "And the second is like it." One of my seminary professors explained Jesus' explanation like this: "Commandment 1A is to love the Lord, and commandment 1B is to love others." As you think about the second table of the law, the last six commandments, they all deal with how we are to love other people, so Jesus' summary of the law, "To love your neighbor as yourself," is a very direct explanation and summary of those six laws.

It is easy for us to know the law, and to talk about the law, but living it out in our lives is a completely different thing. But as we look at Jesus' life in the gospels, it is clear that he didn't just talk about the law, he actually lived it out like no one else has ever done, or could ever do. How else do you explain the cross, except to say that Jesus was living out commandment 1A? He went to the cross because he loved the Father with all of his being, and as a result

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desired to do the Father's will above anything else, even if it meant dying on the cross.

**John 6:37-39** *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.*

How else do you explain the cross, other than the fact that Jesus was living out commandment 1B? He went to the cross because he loved his neighbor (that's us), more than himself.

**John 13:1** *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*

**John 15:12-13** *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

Because of Jesus' perfect obedience to the law, he is the spotless Lamb of God, our perfect sacrifice of atonement.

**Hebrews 2:17 - 18** *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

### **February 24 – Matthew 5: 13 – 28**

This law that God gave to Moses and the Israelites shows us just how far we have fallen short of God's standard. Although, sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking we are keeping the law much better than we are. In the verses we read today, Jesus does three things. He reminds us that the law is still in effect (verses 17-19). The fact that Jesus has come doesn't do away with the law. Jesus also explains the depths of the law (verses 20-28). For example, he tells us that the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment against murder isn't just about taking someone else's life, it's about hating them to the

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point where you wish they would die. And the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, forbidding adultery, isn't just about a physical act; it's about the things that go on in our private thought life.

Based on Jesus' commentary on the law who of us isn't guilty of great sin? We are all guilty and we all stand condemned.

**Romans 3:22-23** *There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..*

But because of Christ's obedience to the law and Christ's death on the cross we are declared to be righteous in God's sight. How can that be? Because of the third thing Jesus tells us about the law in these verses. He didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law (verse 17). And Because Jesus has done that for us, our righteousness can exceed that of the Pharisees (verse 20). In Jesus day, the Pharisees were the religious professionals. It was thought that no one kept the law like they did. If men were to be judged against the law, surely the Pharisees' righteousness would set the standard. But what does Jesus say in verse 20? Even their "supposed righteousness" isn't good enough. We need a righteousness that exceeds their righteousness in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven. Where do we find righteousness like that? Jesus!

**Romans 3:21-24** *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

**February 25 – Matthew 19: 16 - 30**

In today's reading, Jesus takes us straight to the heart of the law. It is relatively easy to make it look like you are doing a good job keeping the law, like this rich young ruler had apparently been doing, but as Jesus talks to this man he exposes what the man really loves. In fact, as Jesus talks with this man, Jesus exposes the fact that this man is not really a law keeper but a law breaker.

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For his whole life, this man has kept a scorecard of how good he is. The sad truth is his judgment of his goodness is based on how he sees himself in comparison to the rest of the world. By all appearances, he is a good man and a keeper of the law. But just like with the Pharisees, Jesus was able to see past the external appearance and into the heart of this man.

**Matthew 23:27-28** *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*

On the outside this man looked beautiful, but what about the inside? What was really in his heart? When Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give it to the poor, and then come and follow him what does the man do? He walks away sad. He wants eternal life, he wants the Kingdom of Heaven, but he wants his stuff more. What does his failure to do what Jesus told him to do expose about his ability to keep the law? Doesn't his response to what Jesus said indicate that he wasn't really keeping the law at all? Doesn't his response show that he loved his money more than God? If that is the case, then is he really loving the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind? Doesn't his response also show that he loved his money more than his neighbor? This man had clearly fooled himself into thinking he was better than he really was. He loved and needed his money more than he loved and needed Jesus. Why would that be so? Because his self righteousness, that was based in his own view of how well he kept the law, kept him from seeing his need for a savior.

When we get down to the heart of the law, we see that there can be nothing that we love more than God, and nothing other than God that we love more than our neighbors. The heart of the law exposes our hearts, the heart of the law exposes the fact that we are far worse sinners than we ever dared to dream that we are, and the heart of the law exposes just how desperately we need a savior. As the law exposes these two things to us, it also drives us to the cross where we experience the depths of Christ's love for us.

**Romans 5:8** *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*



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**John 15:13** *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

The more we see and understand our sin and Christ's love for us, the more we will be able to love both the Lord and our neighbor.

**February 26 – Romans 3: 10 – 28**

It is hard to say that one passage of Scripture is more important than others, and in fact, it can be downright dangerous since it is all the Word of God. However, having said that, this is one of the most important passages in all of Scripture! Consider it carefully.

Quoting from several different Old Testament passages (verses 10 -18), Paul makes the case that none of us are righteous in God's sight. We may fool ourselves, and we may even fool others, but we don't fool God. Paul goes on to tell us in verse 19 that because of the law and because of our sin, we will all face a day when God will call us to account, and will have every right to pass judgment on us and pronounce a verdict of guilty against us (verse 20). As we stand before God, we will realize that we are not nearly as good as we think we are. In fact, rather than being declared righteous because of our ability to keep the law, we will all stand condemned because of our inability to keep the law.

But then look what Paul says starting in verse 21. There is a righteousness that we can have that doesn't come to us by works or our ability to keep the law, but by faith in Christ alone. In spite of the fact that we are all sinners, who deserved to be condemned to hell (verse 23), because of our own inability to keep the law, there is still a way for us to be declared righteous in God's sight, and it is through faith in Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. This is such an important point for us to understand, and one that we so easily forgotten. So often we just think of the cross as the way our sins are forgiven, but that is only half the story. We need forgiveness, but we also need righteousness. The only way we can ever stand in the presence of God is if we are declared to be righteous in His sight.

**Psalm 1:5-6** *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

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Christ's death on the cross makes a way for us to come into the presence of God.

**1 Peter 3:18** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God*

Look again at Romans 3: 23-24. Even though we are sinners, there is a way for us to be justified (made righteous in God's sight), and it is through Christ's death on the cross. Christ's death on the cross doesn't just give us forgiveness for our sins, it also gives us Christ's perfect record of righteousness as our own. We aren't just forgiven, we are made completely right in God's sight. Not because of our obedience or our ability to keep the law, but because of Jesus' perfect obedience.

**Galatians 2:21 - 3:1** *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

We must never fall into the deadly trap of thinking our righteousness comes from our own ability to keep the law. We must never think that Jesus died just to forgive our sins, but now it is up to us to earn our righteousness. Righteousness comes through faith in Christ, and that is why Christ must be the only thing of worth in our lives.

**Philippians 3:7-9** *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*