

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

**March 13 – Exodus 33: 18 – 34: 7**

Moses is one of the very few people to have a direct encounter with God. He had already had one encounter with God at the burning bush in Exodus 3, but now Moses wanted more. He wanted to know God in a deeper way—Moses wanted to see this glorious God who had called Moses to serve him, so that Moses could enjoy an even deeper relationship with God. As you read the account, you read in 33:20 that God would not allow Moses to see His face, because that would be just too much for Moses to see—it would literally kill him. So, God takes Moses to a cleft in a rock on the side of the mountain, where God's own hand can hide him, and God allows His goodness to pass in front of Moses. What I want us to notice is in verses 5 - 7 of chapter 34. Look at God's self proclamation. God proclaims that He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, and forgiving of wickedness, rebellion and sin. That sounds great doesn't it? But then, at the end of verse 7, God adds that He does not leave sin unpunished. In fact, God tells Moses that He is so serious about sin that He punishes it to the third and fourth generation. We don't have to think very hard of examples of how a father's sin can affect his children, grandchildren, and even great-children in the generations that follow.

So, that brings us to the key question that should be on each of our minds as we read this: How can a loving and merciful God still punish sin? How can a faithful God still keep his promises to people who aren't faithful to Him? The answer to both of these questions is found in the cross. The cross is the expression of God's faithfulness to an unfaithful people. God was so intent on keeping his promise to make us His own that He allowed His Son to die, so the promise could be kept.

The cross is the place where God's love and mercy violently collide with God's justice, and the resulting collision crushed Jesus as he hung there on the cross.

**Isaiah 53:5** *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

Don't ever make the mistake of sacrificing God's justice on the altar of God's love, and think that because God loves us He won't punish us. If

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

we think that, we truly do believe in cheap grace, and the grace that God showed to us was anything but cheap—it cost him everything.

**March 14 – Exodus 34: 29 – 35**

Moses' close up encounter with God leaves him visibly changed—so changed that his appearance now scares the Israelites to death. Because he has encountered God, Moses' face glowed, and he had to cover it with a veil. In the Old Testament, encounters with God were rare exceptions, but as you read through the Old Testament, you will never find any place where an encounter with God didn't change the person in profound ways. Those encounters just didn't happen very often. People were separated from God, so separated that even the glow that Moses had after he encountered God scared them to death.

When Moses set up the tabernacle, in accordance with the plans that God had given to Moses, he set it up with a curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was the place where the Spirit of God resided, and the High Priest could only go behind the curtain once a year on the Day of Atonement. As Jesus died on the cross, Matthew tells us that this curtain was ripped in two.

**Matthew 27:50-51** *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. <sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

The only thing that changes, when we come to the New Testament, is that because of Jesus our encounters with God become more frequent and more personal. Because of Jesus, the curtain that separated us from God was torn in two, which means that we can now enter the presence of God. In fact, John's Gospel tells us that not only can we enter the presence of God, but because of Jesus, God's presence enters us.

**John 14:23** *Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*

God no longer dwells behind the veil in the tabernacle; encounters with God are no longer the exception. The Christian encounters God on a daily basis, and those encounters change us over time. The more time we spend with God, the more we begin to look like our savior.

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

**2 Corinthians 3:7-18** *Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory....<sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away....<sup>16</sup> But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Through Christ, we experience God and that experience changes us. Through Christ, we, more and more, become the image of God that we were originally created to be.

**March 15 – Leviticus 1: 1 – 13**

The book of Leviticus describes all of the different sacrifices that are to be brought before the Lord, and there is one constant in all of these sacrifices. They were to be perfect without defect or blemish—this was a costly sacrifice for the Israelite to make. The value of a sacrifice was in direct proportion to its cost.

David makes this point about the costliness of the sacrifice when he was speaking about buying Araunah's threshing floor as a place to offer a sacrifice to God.

**2 Samuel 24: 24** *"I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." To offer a sacrifice that was worthless meant that the sacrificial act was also worthless.*

To offer an animal that was second rate or flawed was an abomination to God. In Malachi, which is written toward the very end of the Old Testament period, we see God condemn Israel for bringing defective second rate sacrifices to offer to Him.

**Malachi 1: 7 - 14** *"You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. <sup>8</sup> When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor!*

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

*Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. <sup>9</sup> "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-- says the LORD Almighty. <sup>10</sup> "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. <sup>11</sup> My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.'" <sup>13</sup> And you say, "What a burden!" and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. <sup>14</sup> "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.*

Without defect meant the animal had to be flawless and a flawless animal cost an Israelite dearly. It meant taking a prize specimen from their own flock and devoting it to God. What a wonderful picture of Jesus this gives to us. God's own perfect sacrifice made for us—without defect and of infinite worth. Consider how the writer of Hebrews uses this imagery in referring to Jesus.

**Hebrews 9:12-14** *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. <sup>14</sup> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

Notice how the writer of Hebrews refers to Jesus as unblemished, and because of the infinite worth of Jesus' sacrifice it is the end of all sacrifices. There best has been offered there is no further need for any other or anymore sacrifices.

**March 16 -- Hebrews 10: 1 - 14**

The first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus spell out all of the different sacrifices that were required of the Israelites. There were burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship offerings, sin offerings, and guilt

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

offerings that were prescribed by God in the book of Leviticus. These sacrifices had different modes and means, but they had one thing in common, and, that is they allowed the Israelite to have a relationship with God.

But the sacrifices of the Old Testament only pointed the Israelites to something better. Notice the sense of hopelessness in what the writer of Hebrews says:

**Hebrews 10: 1 – 4** For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup>Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup>But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. <sup>4</sup>It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

These sacrifices by themselves could never take away sin. It was impossible for them to do that. All the sacrifices could do was point a person to the hope that God would provide a better, more permanent, lasting sacrifice, which He would do through Jesus.

In Romans 5:10, Paul tells us that we are reconciled to God through Christ's blood. To be reconciled means, that once again, we can have a relationship with God. As one considers the entire multitude of sacrifices that were prescribed in Leviticus to have a relationship with God, one can see the wonderful sufficiency of Christ's once and for all sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews makes the comparison for us of the Old Testament priest having to continually offer sacrifices and the one time efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

**Hebrews 10:11-12** *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.*

The only way we can truly understand the value of the sacrifice Christ has made for us is by comparing what Christ did to what the Levitical law required. The sacrifice that Jesus offered for us far outshines any of the sacrifices God told the Israelites to make to Him. It is the perfect sacrifice, once and done, completely sufficient. These sacrifices in Leviticus are pictures of the ultimate sacrifice that was to come in Christ.

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

**March 17 – Leviticus 8: 1 – 36**

By understanding the priestly requirements of Leviticus we can better understand what the writer of Hebrews means when he refers to Jesus as our Great High Priest. It is through the words of Leviticus 8 that we understand Hebrews 9. In Leviticus 8, we see the ritual that Aaron and his sons had to go through during their in service in the Tabernacle. In verses 1 – 5, we hear God tell Moses to assemble Aaron and his sons, their special garments, anointing oil, a bull for the sin offering, two rams, and the unleavened bread—all of which had been described in the preceding chapters. Then Moses carries out the elaborate ritual of first washing Aaron and his sons with water, then dressing them in the priestly garments, and then anointing both the tabernacle with its furnishings and Aaron and his sons. Next the bull is offered to make atonement for the sins of Aaron and his sons as well as to consecrate (set apart as holy) the altar. Next, the first ram was slain. Notice with both the bull and this ram, Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the head of the animal as a symbolic way of transferring their guilt to that which is to be sacrificed. Before they could minister to the people, they first had to make themselves clean. This is a key point that the writer of Hebrews draws out and emphasizes in Hebrews 9:11-15.

**Hebrews 9:11-15** *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. <sup>14</sup> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! <sup>15</sup> For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Here the writer of Hebrews points out that Aaron and his sons had to first be made clean themselves before they could enter the Most Holy Place. However, for Jesus this was not so. He was already clean because he was sinless. How can we begin to understand the

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

significance of this, if we do not first understand how much preparation Aaron and his sons had to go through before they could serve?

As we examine the book of Leviticus and see all that was necessary for Aaron to serve and then compare that with Jesus, we can quickly see the superiority of Jesus as our High Priest. While Aaron was able to sympathize with the people of Israel because he knew what it meant to be a sinner, Aaron was also sinful and first had to atone for his own sins before he could deal with the sins of the people. This is not so with Jesus, for though he was tempted in every way just as we are he was without sin, and being without sin he was able to enter the Most Holy Place to offer a sacrifice on our behalf. He knows our weakness, he knows our struggles because he endured them as well, but he endured them without sin so that he is the perfect High Priest and the perfect sacrifice.

**March 18 – Leviticus 10: 1 – 11**

Today's reading contains the tragic tale of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. Aaron was the brother of Moses, and as you may recall he was chosen by God to be Moses' spokesman before Pharaoh, and then Aaron was chosen by God to be Israel's first High Priest. Aaron's sons served alongside of Aaron in the tabernacle. We have already seen the care that was involved in preparing them to serve and consecrating them for service, which shows us how seriously God took their role of serving in the tabernacle. As you read this passage, it is not clear what it was exactly that Nadab and Abihu did, but what is clear is that whatever they did was out of accord with what God had commanded them to do. Based on what God says to Aaron in verse 8 – 11, it is possible that their sin was brought on by the fact that they were drunk, as they came to serve before the Lord, in the tabernacle.

Depending on the version of the Bible you read this passage from, you will see the fire described as either unauthorized or strange fire. What this indicates is that the incense and fire that they offered to the Lord was not what God had prescribed. It is possible that the fire itself came from a source outside of the tabernacle and was therefore not holy, or that the incense that they put in the fire was not made according to the

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

formula that God had given to the Israelites in Exodus 30. Whatever the case, what they offered in worship to the Lord was unacceptable to Him.

Sometimes we are tempted to look at stories like this from the Old Testament and think God was just meaner back then, and He is not so uptight today. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Malachi 3:6** *"I the LORD do not change.*

God is still the same today as He was then. We can't just worship Him and approach Him any way we feel like it. If we want to come into the presence of the Lord, it can't be with the unauthorized fire of our own good works. Think about how Paul described his own good works (righteousness):

**Philippians 3:7-9** *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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.*

Rubbish smells, and so do our own good works in God's sight. Our good works are not pleasing to God, because in spite of our good works we are tainted by sin and that sin fouls everything about us. If we want to be able to approach God, we must come in the name of Jesus and his sinless, untainted righteousness. Jesus is the only name by which we can come into the presence of God. If we think we can offer God our own good works as an offering, the same thing that happened to Nadab and Abihu will happen to us. It is tempting for us to try to add our own good works to the righteousness that Christ has already given to us. Somehow, we think our good works can improve what Christ has done for us, but nothing can be further from the truth. It is in Christ and Christ alone that we enter the presence of God. Christ's sacrifice is the only offering that we have to give that is acceptable to God. If we try to come with anything else we too will be struck down.



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

**March 19 – Leviticus 14: 1 – 20**

We don't think too much about leprosy in our culture, and as we come to passages like this in the book of Leviticus, we think that maybe they don't have much to say to us today. But before we jump to that conclusion, let's just step back and think about this in a new way.

In Israel's day, when a person contracted an infectious skin disease they were considered to be unclean, because of this, these persons were excluded from the camp of Israel. They were so excluded that they had to move and live outside of the camp or city. So excluded that when they were walking along the road and a person was coming from the other way, the person with leprosy had to move to the far side of the road and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!"

So, to be cleansed from leprosy was a big deal, and there was an elaborate ritual and ceremony to bring the person back into the camp and society. Now with all of that in mind, stop and think about the Gospel accounts of Jesus interacting with those with leprosy.

In Matthew 8:1-4, we find Jesus dealing with a man infected with the disease of leprosy. There are several important considerations to be found here. First, notice that Jesus told this man to fulfill the requirements of Leviticus 14:1-20. Jesus directed the healed man to go to the priest and present himself (14:3), and then present the offering described in Leviticus 14:4-20. Notice that Jesus did not put aside the law spelled out in Leviticus, but rather he applied it and practiced it.

In many ways this act with the leper is a picture of how Christ deals with us. His touch makes us clean, but then we are still called to adhere to the provisions of the law. His touch doesn't mean we no longer have to obey, in fact just the opposite, his touch provides the means for us to obey.<sup>1</sup>

Now, I must be quick to point out another interesting feature of this account in Matthew 8:1-4 that would seemingly contradict what I just said. Notice that Jesus touches the leprous man, an act that would normally have been forbidden, because in so doing one would become unclean (Leviticus 13). A similar situation arises in Luke's account of

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Seiss, *The Gospel in Leviticus*. (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1907) p 253.

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

the widow of Nain in Luke 7. Here Jesus touches the coffin of the widow's son, again an act that would have made him unclean. Was Jesus violating the law in these instances? Did Jesus become ceremonially unclean in either of these instances? No, because the very thing that would have made him unclean was dealt with and eradicated by him.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4 that Jesus was born under the law. Here, in these two accounts, we see how Jesus operated within the framework of Levitical law, and only by understanding that law, can we really begin to understand the significance of how Jesus systematically fulfilled the law in perfect obedience. His touch or his spoken word could make things right, but still in every instance the law was followed to the letter.

What can we learn from this? We live in a broken world, with people who are broken and made unclean by their sin. It is easy for us to run from them shouting "Unclean!" But that is not what Jesus did is it? He entered into their brokenness and uncleanliness. He touched them and brought the cleansing power of God's love and mercy to their lives, but as he healed them, he also exhorted them to follow God's Law in complete obedience. There is the model for our ministry! We must be willing to draw near to those who are unclean and defiled by sin, and offer the healing power of the Gospel. We must come to them where they are and bring the healing power of Christ's love to their lives, but as we do that, we must also call them to obedience, because Christ is not just a healing savior, He is Lord of lords.

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