God with Us - Part Two

# The Force of Grace

## (Leviticus 26:1-13)

Welcome, I am so glad you joined us today. If you were with us last week, we began a new series called “God with Us”. Over the past couple months, we’ve been tracking the life of Moses, and now God is doing a new thing, he’s not just leading the Israelites, but he’s come down and he’s dwelling among them. And so, this principal, this foreshadowing, that God is with us, is really an anchor Scripture as followers of Christ. We know what it means that,

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).*

And so, we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast, because Jesus went before us, he entered the inner sanctuary on our behalf, he went behind the curtain as our high priest forever.

That is such good news when you are in the wilderness of life, when you’re walking in this season of COVID-19, and things aren’t going the way that you want them to. When you’re hurting, worried and afraid, battling with depression, you need some good news. You need that phone call that the results came back negative. You need that moment when you wake up and recognize that your baby slept through the night. You need good news, you need to know that God is with you, that he is dwelling among us.

This is the situation where we find the Israelites, they are in the desert, in the wilderness, life is difficult, and they’re having a hard time adjusting to this new environment. It had been a year since they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt when Moses came down the mountain from meeting with God with this amazing news. In Exodus chapter 25, God told him, *“tell the Israelites to bring me an offering and have them make a sanctuary for me where I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:1-8)*. And so, this was good news and the Israelites were excited because they had seen what God could do. They had seen him deliver them from Egypt with a mighty hand. They saw how he parted the Red Sea so that they could walk through on dry ground. Every day they were reminded of his provision as he gave them bread from heaven. And now he wanted them to build him a sanctuary so that he could come down and dwell with them.

This was good news, because they had been in this barren and dry place for so long that many of them were beginning to wonder if this was all there was. You know, they were told that they were going out into the desert to worship God, but their experience had been so much less than what they were hoping for. In fact, many of them were just wishing it would be over, like we want to get out through this season of COVID-19, to get back to school, back to work, and we feel like we’re stuck in this barren place. It’s so difficult because it just keeps going on and on and on and we’ve begun to feel really disoriented, but now suddenly there is a glimmer of hope. And so, the Israelites were ecstatic, they gave generously, and got right to work building the tabernacle.

Now remember, these are people with a good work ethic, they had been slaves for 400 years, they had built Egypt, they had proven themselves as skilled artisans, and so they weren’t just laborers, but they were gifted and talented builders. And the Bible tells us in Exodus chapter 39, when they had completed all of the work on the tabernacle, they brought it to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings.

*“Moses inspected their work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded, and so Moses blessed them” (Exodus 39:43).*

The Israelites were now ready to worship God, this was why he had called them out of Egypt, telling the Pharaoh, *“Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert” (Exodus 7:16)*. But now the challenge facing Moses was to teach them how to worship the one true God. You see, they had been slaves under Pharaoh and so Moses had to break them of 400 years of pagan idolatry. He had to create a new normal, because now they were a new nationality, but they didn’t know how to be a nation because all they’d known was how to be slaves.

And so, in Exodus, God gave them the 10 Commandments, he gave them instructions for building the tabernacle, and now in Leviticus he gives them the sacraments. He describes the rituals and functions of the priesthood and he gives them rules for holy living, because he is a holy God. He gives them principles to set them apart, to make them distinctive among the nations, because he is dwelling among them. And in Leviticus chapter 26 he tells them,

*“Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God.*

*"'Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 26:1-2).*

And he begins by telling his kids how they’re to behave in his house, because they had just built God a sanctuary in the wilderness, but they don’t know how to worship him yet. And so, he says, don’t do that, don’t touch this, don’t go in there, because there are some things that are dangerous. In other words, it’s like telling your children not to put their finger in the electric outlet, because in the tabernacle there are some things that are holy, there are objects that are sacred, and the unholy can’t come into contact with the holy. But the Israelites, the children of God didn’t have a clue because they had been living in a culture where nothing was holy.

And so, God says in verse two, *“Have reverence for my sanctuary” (Leviticus 26:2)*. Because he is the Lord and he’s not going to put up with them playing with that which is sacred. He doesn’t want them imitating that which was holy or coming into his presence arrogantly and without respect. And so, we don’t run around in here, we don’t climb on the chairs and play hide and seek, because God says, “Have reverence for my sanctuary.” In other words, God is saying that this isn’t just a large room, it’s a sanctuary, it’s a holy place, because it’s where we meet with God. Now, I know that for some of us this is new because we haven’t been taught to honor anything, we don’t respect anything, but we need to understand that some things are holy.

Here we find God establishing order in his house. The Israelites are being taught how to worship, even though instinctively they know how, they didn’t really know how to worship God. In fact, the Bible says,

*“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but… they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:21-23).*

And so, even though they were born with an instinct to worship, they had to be taught how to worship, because it’s about the object of your worship.

Moses is teaching them how to worship, not the way they worshiped in Egypt, not worshiping created things, not worshiping the way they want to, but the way God wants them to worship him. And so, it’s about what God wants, not about what’s convenient or about how you feel or even what makes sense. And so, we don’t just clap because we’re happy, we clap because the Bible says,

*“Clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with the voice of triumph” (Psalms 47:1, NKJV).*

When we’re worshiping, we’re not just shouting and clapping to make noise, we’re shouting and clapping because God says march around Jericho six times, start walking like you’ve got the victory, even if you can’t see it, and even if you don’t feel it. In other words, true spiritual worship is a lot about attitude, it’s about our mindset, it’s because you recognize that you’re in the presence of God and he’s dwelling with you. That’s why the Bible says,

*“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8,NKJV).*

And so, Moses begins teaching them about holy things, because before God can bless them, they need to learn to do what it takes to be eligible to walk in the presence, the blessings, and the promises of God. And this is just as important today as it was then because you’re not just going to be blessed just because you want to be blessed. There is going to be something required of you, for you to walk into what God has for you to receive. And so, God says in verse three,

*“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit” (Leviticus 26:3-4).*

Notice he doesn’t say I will send you rain when you want it, or I will send you rain when you think you need it, but he says I will send you rain in its season. In other words, there is no doubt he’s going to send the rain, but there is a rainy season and there is a dry season. The thing we need to concern ourselves with, the thing we need to worry about, is whether or not we have plowed and planted before he sends the rain.

In fact, we talked about this on Wednesday in Bible study, God is not going to do your planting; God is not going to sow for you. You have got to plant the seeds. And so, if you’re not getting ready, if you’re not tilling the soil and sowing the seeds, it will diminish your ability to receive a harvest. You’ve got to get ready so that when the rain comes that God has something to bless. In other words, God will only bless what you do, that’s what the Bible tells us in Psalm chapter 1.

*“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Psalms 1:1-3).*

And so, God can’t prosper, he can’t bless that which you will not do, but he’s already prepared to send the rain in its season. That tells me, if I want to be blessed, I’ve got to open up his Word, I’ve got to study the Word of God, I’ve got to hurry and get that soil broken up, I’ve got to get my seed in the ground, I’ve got to be ready so that when the rain comes I’m ready to receive what God has for me.

The problem with the Israelites was that many of them hadn’t gotten over Egypt, many of them were still ready to pack their bags and go home, and so they’re still thinking like slaves and they’re not ready to receive his blessing. But God is encouraging them to quit wasting time, to forget Egypt, to get ready and get some seed in the ground, because the rain is coming on schedule. And he promises them in verse five,

*“Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting... (Leviticus 26:5).*

And so, he’s talking about the cyclical nature of things and telling them to be strategic, to plan ahead, looking forward and not backward, to have a strategy for increase and not for poverty. In other words, when the sun is shining you’ve got to be harvesting over here, you’ve got to be planting over there, because there is a cycle to things and before you get the wheat harvested, the grapes are going to be coming in.

You see, God intends for his people to have an abundance, but if you’re not sowing into your life, he can’t bless it, and you can’t expect an increase. Certainly, threshing is hard work, planting and harvesting grapes is hard work, a powerful prayer life takes intentionality, knowing the Bible is a lot of work, but your efforts will not be wasted. Preparation is never time wasted and because you know that the rain is coming in its season, you want to use every opportunity to fertilize what God is about to bless in your life. And then God says at the end of verse five, he tells them,

*“You will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land” (Leviticus 26:5).*

God wants his people to live in safety, free from anxiety, safe enough to be authentic, safe enough to be vulnerable, safe enough to be weak, and safe enough to be humble. God says you will live in safety in your land and then he says,

*"'I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country” (Leviticus 26:6).*

In other words, there is no one, nothing, not even the savage beasts will make you afraid. There is nothing that is too big for you to handle, nothing that is to mean for you to fight, not even the sword will pass through your country. And so, he says he will grant peace in the land, no one will make you afraid, because he will protect you, and then he says in verse seven,

*“You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you” (Leviticus 26:7-8).*

*“I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new” (Leviticus 26:9-10).*

In other words, because of my favor, you’re going to do more with less. Five of you will chase a hundred, a hundred will chase ten thousand. In other words, it may look like less, but you’re going to do even more with it. Whatever your numbers are he says, “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers...” And so, he’s talking about abundance, divine favor, and he says, you will still be eating last year’s harvest when you have to get up and figure out where you’re going to put the new harvest.

In this passage, God is telling his people, this is the way that I want you to plant, so that as soon as you get through with this, here comes something else and you’re not even finished with that yet. You see, in his presence there is abundance, and you’re going to have to move this out of the way to get ready for the next thing that’s about to come into your life. And then he says, and this is so powerful, he says,

*“I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high” (Leviticus 26:11-13).*

God promises his presence, his protection, and his provision if they would honor him, follow his decrees, and obey his commands. He says, I will keep my covenant with you, and so there’s this reciprocity in this covenant relationship. That’s the kind of confidence God wants you and I to have, that you would come to him with your head held high, trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. That’s why the Bible tells us,

*“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).*

That’s how close we are to God on this side of the cross, because of Jesus we can approach the throne of grace with confidence. He is our great high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, in appearance as a man. And so, we can approach boldly as followers of Christ, because we are one with him, we are family, we are kin. In fact, the Bible says we are the sanctuary in second Corinthians chapter 6,

*“For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16).*

Today, you and I can come boldly and confidently to the throne of grace because it’s not about a location, it’s about an ideology. It’s not about the space, it’s about the grace, and so I want to encourage you to approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that you may receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need. You see, this is our time of need, this is America’s time of need, COVID-19’s everywhere, the economy is shaking, jobs are unstable, but we know where to find grace to help us in our time of need.

Even now, God is reaching out to you, bringing you to himself, because he has plans for you…

*“I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).*

You are that valuable to him, he cares for you so much that he sent his son Jesus who died and rose again so that he could fill you with his spirit. Now God’s presence dwells within you, he’s working in your life, he has supernatural plans to use you and to bless you. He’s always with you, he’s always close, and therefore, the Bible says,

*“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).*

Here’s what I hope you will understand, when we are wandering in the wilderness and we feel all alone, feeling like nobody understands, we have a God who understands and who cares. If you’ll stop for a moment from the busyness of the world and approaches throne of grace with confidence, having purified yourself from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God he will meet you there. You will be ready for the presence of God. He is that close. Let’s take a moment and pray together.

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